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The Role of the Trickster Figure and Four Afro-Caribbean Meta-Tropes In the Realization of Agency by Three Slave Protagonists

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The Role of the Trickster Figure and Four Afro-Caribbean Meta-Tropes
in the Realization of Agency by Three Slave Protagonists

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I aim to demonstrate that the figure of the trickster is a key trope for the achievement of agency by the narrators of the three slave narratives *Autobiografía de un esclavo*, “Routes in North Africa by Abú Bekr eş şiddīk” [sic], and *Biografía de un cimarrón*. I also intend to show how both the realization of the trickster's role—and the achievement of agency to which such a role is oriented—are dependent on the use of the four Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes *ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi*.

To demonstrate this, I plan to analyze these four meta-tropes; their correspondence with the four master tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony; their roles in the process of composing a slave narrative; and their functions in each narrative. To underscore the relevance of trickster figures to the two cycles of meta-tropes, I will address the correspondence between epistemological irony and certain trickster figures including Yoruba trickster Eshu, the African-American trickster known as the Signifying Monkey, and the culminating Afro-Caribbean meta-trope *simbi*. More specifically, I will explain how each figure may be said to subsume the conflict between ideological irony and epistemological irony, which ultimately leads to the renewal of the cycle of tropes. I will analyze the Ifá divination system of the Yoruba religion and explain how its communicative protocol and semiotic implications parallel the functions of the master tropes and the narrative techniques used in slave narratives. In addition, I hope to explain how—due to their potential for classification, alteration, perpetuation,

and destruction—racial categories, slaves, and texts may all be said to function as tropes. Finally, I hope to show how the protective strategies used by African diasporic communities for the purpose of cultural preservation relate to the inherently figurative nature of language.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Theoretical Background

1.1 Introduction

In this dissertation, I hope to prove that the trickster figure is a key trope for the achievement of agency—the ability to act, by one’s own volition, to realize goals—by the narrators of the three slave narratives *Autobiografía de un esclavo*, “Routes in North Africa by Abú Bekr eṣ ṣiddīk” [sic], and *Biografía de un cimarrón*. I also aim to show how both the realization of the trickster’s role—and the achievement of agency to which such a role is oriented—depend on the use of Yoruba-derived meta-tropes: *ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi*. Given the intervention by white editors who facilitated the publication of each narrative, the function of the trickster, which is applicable to narration, interpretation, and literary criticism, is to a certain degree transferred from the narrators-cum-protagonists of African descent to their white collaborators. Thus, it may be tempting to conclude that the agency of editors eclipses that of narrators, and that the final version of each narrative creates a new form of racial—albeit literary—exploitation, effectively reinforcing rather than overturning the status quo. However, to reach such a conclusion ignores the fundamental role of the meta-tropes, both in shaping the narrative and in providing subtle signs of the preservation of Afro-Caribbean culture against colonial oppression. While the Yoruba were not a dominant ethnic group among slaves, the Yoruba orishas—entities that approximate deities—became a foundation for a Pan-African religion in the New World (Gates, *Latin* 23). Thus, the meta-tropes, with their

multivalent folkloric, religious, and literary-critical applications, are appropriate for the analysis of African diasporic cultures. While the factual accuracy of each of these narratives is undoubtedly compromised by a variety of subjective elements on the part of both narrators and editors, their symbolic perpetuation of the Afro-Caribbean culture—or on a more minute level, the cultural identity of each protagonist—is largely intact.

To demonstrate this, I plan to analyze the four Afro-Caribbean tropes in terms of their folkloric functions in the African and African-diasporic cultures, and their correspondence with the four so-called master tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. In a related vein, I will explain how the culminating Afro-Caribbean trope, *simbi*, may be said to subsume the conflict between ideological and epistemological irony. Analyzing these tropes and their correspondence is important for several reasons. First, it will demonstrate that even texts as ostensibly simple as slave narratives possess a high degree of rhetorical and conceptual complexity that is largely concealed by their rudimentary vocabulary and grammar, and their oral style. Second, it will show that, in spite of the heavy revision carried out by white editors, these narratives still maintain a substantial degree of the narrators' own cultures and identities, through the use of tropes bearing both literary and non-literary connotations on both literal and figurative levels. In the narratives of Manzano and Abū Bakr, where none of these tropes is mentioned explicitly, it is reasonable to assume that they still formed a part of the cultural heritage, due both to the pan-African influence of Yoruba culture among slave populations and to the syncretism of Islamic and Yoruba influences in the region of West Africa from which Abū Bakr hailed. Third, this approach should illustrate how the culminating trope in each system—irony in the literary-critical system, *simbi* in the Afro-Caribbean one—parallels

the underlying goals of concealment and trickery in all three narratives. Through their various forms of deception, the narratives reflect remnants of Yoruba culture that are only partially visible to an observer unfamiliar with Yoruba culture or its outgrowths in the New World such as Santería and Candomblé. This tendency is in keeping with the strategy found both in African and African-derived cultures to provide outside observers with part—but not all—of the message of their texts, with the ulterior motive of keeping some of it secret. Lastly, *simbi*'s status as the over-arching trope in the Afro-Caribbean system highlights its sometime personification as a monkey and, in doing so, reiterates its association with other monkey figures that are considered to be—or are associated with—tricksters. These include the monkey sidekick of the Yoruba trickster orisha Legba, the Yoruba monkey figure Coco Macaco, the African-American trickster figure known as the Signifyin(g) Monkey, the monkey figure Jiwe in the Efik and Ejagham cultures of Nigeria, and its Cuban derivative referred to alternatively as Güije or Jigüe. *Simbi*'s function calls attention to the deceptively mimetic nature of all of these figures in their roles as counter-signifiers of texts and challengers of traditions. It also brings to mind the use of the monkey as a racist epithet for blacks, suggesting intellectual inferiority, subhuman status, lack of civilizing potential, and an inherent tendency towards mimicry.

While it is possible that white editors were familiar with the concepts of *ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi*—and highly probable that they knew of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony—it is unlikely that they assumed a precise correspondence between the two sets of concepts. Even if such a connection had occurred to them, most would have been unlikely to deliberately fashion texts that utilized the Afro-Caribbean tropes to suggest either the intellectual parity or the covert political and cultural

resistance of subalterns. Further, there is no evidence that they acknowledged the use of tropes in this manner by slaves. Domingo del Monte—a prominent Cuban thinker and leader of the Del Monte Tertulia—while willing to showcase the unique talents of Manzano insofar as they facilitated his own professional and political goals, did not believe blacks to be the equals of whites (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 17). His efforts were aimed at either the assimilation of select individuals such as Manzano or the poet Plácido, or at the deportation of blacks en masse to Africa. Richard Robert Madden—another member of the Del Monte Tertulia, as well as a physician and Special Magistrate for the emancipation of slaves in Jamaica—who expressed his distrust of both Muslims and blacks and commented on their strategies of deception in his own memoirs, would also have been unlikely to knowingly promote ideas of resistance or equality (Postma xviii). Miguel Barnet was unique among editors and ethnographers, both in his self-proclaimed empathy with his narrative's protagonist, and in his stated goal of perpetuating the appreciation of African and African-derived cultures in Cuba. Yet his explicit allusions to Afro-Cuban meta-tropes are infrequent and limited to visually observable phenomena in the quotidian experience of slaves. Thus it is probable that the incorporation of such tropes was done primarily by the slaves themselves in order to signify upon the literal meanings of their narratives, as well as upon any additional writing traditions that they emulated. To underscore the importance of these tropes, it may be useful to consider Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s suggestion that a major challenge of Afro-American literary history is the identification of metaphors for black literary relations from within the Afro-American tradition, and the combination of such metaphors with useful ideas from contemporary literary theory (Gates, Figures 47-48). While Afro-Caribbean slave

narratives are sometimes excluded from the Afro-American canon, this dissertation should show that Gates' observation is relevant to them as well.

Prior to undertaking a close analysis of the three slave narrative, I will provide background information on topics in the historical contexts of Africa and the Caribbean, explain the theory related to various literary topics under consideration, and demonstrate how these topics relate to one another in both literary and non-literary contexts. In doing so, I hope to show how all of them are related to the acquisition of agency.

1.2 Views on the Noble Savage and the Race-Based Justification of Slavery

An important factor that influenced the perception of race was the concept of the noble savage. While this concept long predates the three slave narratives being analyzed here, the noble savage literature on Africans reached its peak in the late 1700s at the same time as the anti-slave trade campaign and possibly overlapping with the lives of two of the protagonists (Drescher 425-26, McGregor 12). Various issues influenced the perception of the noble savage, including its definition, its relative strengths and weaknesses in comparison with a civilized person, and the political goals for which its image and the discourse about it were used. Often associated with the noble savage is the idea of primitivism. Primitive persons were considered freer both physically and emotionally. They were also thought to enjoy superior character and morality, due to an absence of luxuries and an ostensible simplicity of lifestyle (McGregor 12).

The wild man of the Middle Ages matched the noble savage in moral terms because his ignorance of sin was thought to prevent him from being spiritually corrupt. Although degraded, he possessed a certain innocence, which Montaigne compared to a

tabula rasa. Given his lack of artificial attributes, he was thought to possess a higher capacity for insight than educated persons. For this reason, he was envied, admired, and considered by some to be a model of free humanity (McGregor 15, 18).

In the Americas, the first people viewed as noble savages were the native inhabitants of the Caribbean. Their perception by Europeans was initially influenced by the narratives of Columbus, who enthusiastically described them as wild, intelligent, virtuous, beautiful, and innocent, yet did not compare them with Europeans. It was likely the view of their inherent nobility that motivated Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566) to ease their burden by promoting the sale of Africans (Fairchild 10). Las Casas' *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552), written primarily in defense of the native inhabitants of the Caribbean, was one of the texts chiefly responsible for the spread of the *leyenda negra* or black legend (Cro 81, Radcliff-Umstead 331). While Las Casas' humanitarian aims were initially limited to indigenous peoples of the Americas, over time they—and the role of the noble savage—were extended to blacks (Fairchild 10).

When used in literature, the trope of the noble savage served as a convenient example of whatever a writer might aim to prove (McGregor 71). Over time, the image was transformed from the “other” to the “alter ego.” It was considered to be two-faced, conquered, assimilated and, according to Hayden White, “despatialized,” all of which led to a psychic interiorization (178). The typical noble-savage traits allegedly adopted by blacks and peasants included a simple lifestyle close to nature and an inherent nobility of character (179). These ideas are echoed by David Hume (1711-1776), who suggested a doctrine of natural goodness; and Mungo Park (1771-1806), who in his own travel account, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799), tried to illustrate the nobility of

black savages (Fairchild 117). They are also reiterated by Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who claimed that the lack of temptations and luxuries yielded an absence of corruption (122-23). Rousseau's positivistic views are echoed in his superlative description of the beginning of village life, which he identifies as the level reached by most savage nations:

this period of expansion of the human faculties, keeping a just mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our egoism, must have been the happiest and most durable of epochs. The more we reflect on it, the more we shall find that this state was the least subject to revolutions, and altogether the very best man could experience.... The example of savages, most of whom have been found in this state, seems to prove that men were meant to remain in it, that it is the real youth of the world, and that all subsequent advances have been apparently so many steps towards the perfection of the individual, but in reality towards the decrepitude of the species. (Fairchild 126)

From this, one might assume Rousseau's view of primitive man to be largely idyllic, since he portrays it as a model for civilized men to emulate (127). Rousseau admired the savage for his strength, health, contentment, and unpedantic intelligence. The Romantic generation added to these traits the new ones of sensibility, eroticism, fondness for scenery, and emotional deism, thus sentimentalizing Rousseau's figure (137).

In the eighteenth century, the development of the noble savage myth united two opposing traditions. The first is the association of the noble savage with the golden age of peace and innocence, usually connected to Las Casas. The second is the justification of the persecution of Caribbean natives by European colonialist and imperialist governments (Cro 120). Both Voltaire (1694-1778) and Rousseau sympathized with the noble savage, yet they perceived him in different ways. Over time, Voltaire's civilized, noble savage was gradually replaced by Rousseau's primitive man who demanded freedom, equality, and brotherhood—in keeping with the ideals of the French

Revolution—as the basis of the new social contract (Cro 82, 135). During the eighteenth century, the noble savage was allegorized in response to violent confrontations around the world (82). This was partly due to Rousseau’s transformation of it into an allegory of freedom and a revolutionary symbol (91). Nevertheless, it was still an act with racist overtones in which a representative of one race attempted to objectify a member of another. While an important aim of the Black Legend and the corresponding discourse on the noble savage was to defend the humanity, rights, and perfectibility of primitive humans, another important—if opposing—aim was to criticize the so-called “civilized” people who exploited and/or persecuted those of less technologically advanced groups. Rousseau in particular sought to show that Europeans had become enslaved by their own oppressive civilization and that they could find a model of peacefulness to emulate in the very Caribbean indigenes whom they were exploiting (Radcliff-Umstead 334). In spite of Rousseau's claims, interactions between Europeans and natives of other continents were not motivated by the ideal of civilization, but by that of imperial exploitation.

While some writings are overtly ambiguous in their simultaneous defense of humanitarianism and their endorsement of slavery, others are more subtle in their ambiguity. One example of the latter group is Rousseau’s description of primitive man:

He is hardy and robust. His lack of useful implements is compensated for by his perfect bodily development. Nothing frightens him but the unknown, and his simple world presents few novelties. Natural man is indolent, fond of eating and sleeping. He is far healthier and stronger than we, and his senses are necessarily much more acute than ours. (Fairchild 122)

While some of these traits are ostensibly positive, they are more favorably associated with animals than with humans. The references to physical strength, heightened senses, and general fearlessness all deemphasize the intellect. As such Rousseau’s allusion to

them reinforces stereotypes which were used to justify the enslavement of Africans in place of Indians (Fairchild 122).

In other cases, the same trait is perceived differently by various authors. Mungo Park, who was the most influential explorer of Africa in his period, praises Africans for their musical and poetic skills (Fairchild 486). He mentions that the bards who most clearly exemplify these skills formed a highly respected class. The services which they provided include reciting the events of their country and accompanying soldiers into battle to inspire them with tales of their ancestors—some of which were observed by Park among the slave trains with which he traveled—were most clearly valuable in the short term to the safety of the countrymen being defended. However, they were also valuable in the long term in maintaining their country's identity by providing an oral history (486-87). While Park is complimentary of their poetic language, another writer, Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859), is critical of it. He claims that their poetry is unimaginative and that their use of figurative language occurs only by necessity, "language being too poor amongst the savage nations to express any but the rudest thoughts, so that such feelings as are not of hourly occurrence can be expressed only by figures" (495-96). This sentiment is echoed by George Santayana, who claimed that the failure to realize that "what we call the innocence of the eye is often merely the imbecility of the mind" was a reason that primitive poetry was often glorified (496).

Both Voltaire and Rousseau helped to shape the myth of the noble savage into a symbol of revolution (Cro 55). Voltaire's noble savage and the Black Legend associated with it were used primarily as tools of propaganda against the Catholic church in general and the Jesuits in particular (62, 91, 135). While Voltaire found inspiration in the

chronicles of conquest of the Americas, he rejected the tradition of the savage in nature who was isolated from modern concerns. Instead, he advocated a reformist program which would protect native Americans from the Spanish monarchy and the Catholic Church (Radcliff-Umstead 333). This contrasts with the revolutionary inclination of Rousseau's treatment of the savage (Cro 137).

The increasingly humanizing treatment of blacks was facilitated by the Romantic Movement and the anti-slave-trade movement of the late 1700s (Fairchild 10, 198). Another important change that occurred during this period involved the perception of the noble savage by the general populace. For many people, the noble savage had functioned merely as a popular conversation topic, representing the desire to withdraw from civilization rather than to reform the world. However, in the revolutionary period, that began around the turn of the century, it became a symbol of the aim for human perfection (338). Over time, the noble savage was adopted as a symbol of freedom, simplicity, closeness to nature, and perfectibility through retrogression (363).

While Las Casas sought to defend other races from the exploitative, colonizing influence of European powers, many writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries took the opposite approach. A key example of this is Edward Long (1734-1813), who, in his book *The History of Jamaica* (1774), claims that blacks are idle, less intelligent, unable to achieve either social or scientific progress, gluttonous, lustful, and lacking a moral consciousness (Long iii). He attempts to draw a connection between blacks and apes, stating that, "ludicrous as the opinion may seem, I do not think that an orang-outang husband would be any dishonor to an Hottentot female" (xi). Rather than emphasizing their inherent strengths or advocating their freedom as did Las Casas, Long condones the

enslavement of blacks on the basis that it helped to civilize them (Long vii). He further attempts to justify slavery by stating that those enslaved were saved from one of three worse fates which would have befallen them had they remained in Africa: dying of starvation, being killed by enemies, or ending up in a cooking pot (xi). Long also makes use of theories that attempt to justify slavery on the basis of religious claims or statistical misinformation. A common religious argument was that blacks were doomed to perpetual servitude for other races on the basis of their descent from Noah's son Ham (vii). Another frequent claim was that the vast majority of blacks shipped to the Americas were criminals whose only alternative to enslavement would have been execution at the hands of their African captors. While it is indeed true that many slaves were prisoners of war, this in itself was not evidence of a criminal offense on their part, so much as a reflection of the general trend of invasion and capture that existed throughout much of Africa (x).

In the nineteenth century, arguments warning against the negative ramifications of emancipation became more common. Alexis de Tocqueville doubted that emancipation would guarantee peaceful coexistence between the blacks and whites. He had witnessed the racism and disenfranchisement suffered by free blacks in the northern United States and believed that the abolition of slavery would worsen racial tensions. He feared that it would increase white fears and give rise to other forms of oppression. A further concern was the potential desire for retribution on the part of former slaves (Kohn 176). James Hunt, a physician who led the Anthropological Society of London, insisted that blacks were much better off as slaves in the Confederate States of America or in the British West Indies than as savages in Africa or as emancipated residents in the Americas

(Drescher 441). The arguments of Hunt, Long, and Tocqueville reflected a widely held belief during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that slavery was actually ameliorative for blacks.

While some authors were sympathetic towards the plight of the noble savage and sought to portray him in a more positive light, others had a less humanitarian bent. James Grainger described different African tribes largely in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. While he claimed that they should be treated humanely, his evaluation of them in terms of practical aspects suggested a certain degree of dehumanization and reinforced their status as commodities rather than as humans (Fairchild 69). Both Park and Rousseau emphasize negative attributes of Africans and the influence of their claims is evident in the writing of later authors of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, Park's portrayal of Mandingos as thieves is echoed over a century and a half later in Montejo's *Biografia de un cimarrón* (118).

While thinkers from Africa, the Middle East and various European countries all influenced the perception of slavery and the concept of the noble savage, those of the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America likely had the greatest effect on these two phenomena in the Caribbean. The Cuban slave fell under the jurisdiction of a historical regimen coming from the law of Roman slavery. In Spain, slavery had been acknowledged since pre-classical times. Its practice was influenced by Roman slave laws and black slaves were already common in Spain by the time of the first Moorish invasion in 711 (Klein and Leston 229). In Portugal, blacks were considered more amenable people than Muslims to the extent that Portuguese who owned Moorish slaves often tried to exchange them for black ones. Further, blacks were valued less than Moors, with an

exchange rate in Portugal of two Moors for "ten Negroes, a target of buffalo hide and some ostrich eggs" (Woodson 196-97). In Spain during the Golden Age, blacks were more respected than other types of slaves due to their supposed docility and fidelity of service. Many blacks were baptized as Christians in Africa or Spain prior to arriving in the New World. Muslims in Granada were forbidden from owning black slaves to prevent their contamination by Islam (Castellano 57). Literature popularized the stereotypical features of black psychology, such as indulgence, and a pleasant, jovial character (58).

In the Caribbean, Africans were considered advantageous for several reasons. Since they lacked local kinship networks, they were more mobile than Indians, more willing to submit to the demands of Spanish and Portuguese invaders, and more compelled to adapt (Klein and Vinson 21). Africans, along with Spaniards and mestizos, but in contrast to Indians, were categorized as *gente de razón* (people of reason) in Spanish colonial society (41). Africans were included in this category because they came from advanced agricultural or iron-working cultures and were better prepared to work in these industries than native Americans (46).

One of the most influential writers on the issue of African slavery in the Caribbean was José Antonio Saco (1797-1879). Saco's support for abolishing the slave trade was due not to antiracist opinions but to a fear of Africanization in a region where whiteness was idealized. He felt that this danger—stoked by slave revolts from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries—justified limiting the number of Africans coming to Cuba and policing those already present. In addition to abolition of the slave trade, he felt that white immigration, colonization, and miscegenation were necessary to neutralize

the influence of blacks in their midst (Martinez-Echazabal 28). He sought to undertake a type of ethnic cleansing, whose goal was foreshadowed by his omission of blacks from his depiction of Cuban nationality and his exclusion of black cultural elements in his description of Cuba's physical and spiritual components (Morejón and Frye 935-36).

To this end, he argues against any alleged advantages held by Africans regarding tropical labor on the mere basis of climatological similarities between Cuba and Africa, and adds that the similarity of Spain's climate renders its own inhabitants equally capable of laboring in Cuba (Saco, *Supresión* 12-13). In addition, he highlights potential problems associated with Africans, such as their religious customs. Regarding this topic, he states that, "The religious preoccupations and the terror that they imbue in their witches and sorcerers, are also the origin of many misfortunes. *Obeah*, or *Obia*, is the name that the blacks give to these superstitious practices, and he that wishes to be convinced of their pernicious consequences, may consult the history of the Antilles" (15). To an extent, Saco is an apologist for slavery, asserting that even Christian republics permit it. Yet he stresses that the number of slaves must be limited to prevent uprisings, such as those in ancient Rome and Egypt (49). He warns that future importations of African slaves will jeopardize peace and safety in Cuba and asserts that the cessation of the African slave trade is necessary in order for Cubans to maintain the slaves that they possess (50, 63). His mention of Spaniards' comparable ability to work in Cuba is aimed at bringing about an increase in the number of Spanish immigrants to offset the African influence and ultimately replace Africans as laborers.

Argentine sociologist Carlos Octavio Bunge (1875-1918), born five years before slavery's abolition in Cuba, expressed a clear prejudice against people of African descent.

Some critics claim that Bunge believed in the possibility of hybrid regeneration through the interbreeding of Hispanics and Africans, which he considered proximate races. He is also said to have believed Spanish and Indian races to be distant from each other, and that a mixture of the two would eventually lead to degeneration (Martinez-Echazabal 26). In his book, *Nuestra America*, Bunge claims that the great distance between Spanish and Indians impedes their alliance and makes those born of their interbreeding more likely to degenerate. He says little about blacks, except to say that they are closer to the Spanish than are the Indians, and are more resistant than Indians to conditions in mines and punishment from masters (Bunge 120). A much larger portion of his book deals with mulattos. While he acknowledges that mulattos have some Spanish heritage, he extends to them many of the same negative stereotypical traits that his contemporaries commonly associated with blacks. An overarching trait that he attributes to mulattos, and that other nineteenth-century Latin-American authors often attribute to blacks, is duplicity. He believed that mulattos utilized this trait to hide or compensate for other shortcomings, as he expresses in the following passage: "He lacks personal valor. In the dangerous critical moments he difficultly conquers his fear; but, full of subtleties and plies, he will escape the enemy with undulations of a reptile. He is to dissimulate his innate cowardice that he take his terrible airs of bully; likewise, to hide his little generic potency he adopts his postures of Don Juan..." (141) While Bunge condescends to mulattos and to their reproductive capacity, he also reckons them to be a potentially dangerous force that threatens the metropolitan white class: "Since there exists against him the traditional prejudice and condescension and hate, he avenges himself condescending and hating the tradition of the prejudices. He is essentially innovative: in politics, in arts, in letters.

Given his rancor over the past he is the natural enemy of the white... He is the instrument of the posthumous revenge of the negro... He is the revenge of the negro!" (Bunge 140)

Bunge's interpretation has several potential parallels with four master tropes and their Afro-Caribbean counterparts. By portraying mulattos as the manifestation of blacks' revenge against whites, it carries a teleological overtone due to its goal-oriented nature and its sense of finality. The avenging role in which he places mulattos parallels the function of the *nkisi* fetish/hex used by slaves in the Caribbean to seek revenge on their masters. In keeping with José Piedra's esthetic definition of *nkisi* as the relationship between signifier and signified (or to put it another way, the relationship between the known and the unknown that is materialized by the *ndoki* via the creation of the fetish/hex), the mulatto could represent the intermingling of two cultures and races: the white metropolitan (the known) and the black subaltern (the unknown). Further, the chiasmic repetition in the sequence of words "the traditional prejudice and condescension and hate" and "condescending and hating the tradition of the prejudices" (Bunge 140) in his portrayal of mulattos' response to adversity parallels the reversal of the relationship between signifier and signified inherent in *simbi*. It also illustrates a type of "repetition with revision," a theme central to—and sometimes considered synonymous with—the Yoruba ritual (Drewal 12). Bunge neither absolutely denies nor affirms the existence of inferior races (Bunge 143). Yet he shows an unmistakable disfavor for all non-white groups, as well as a particular distrust of both black Africans and their mulatto progeny.

José Ingenieros (1877-1925) was a contemporary of Bunge, whose direct observation of slavery was very limited, and whose post-abolition writings came too late to influence the trade itself. Even so, his opinions were in keeping with apologist

thinkers of earlier generations who were instrumental in perpetuating slavery. He refers to blacks as "an opprobrious scourge of the human species" and adds: "Their enslavement would be the political and legal sanction of a purely biological reality" (Ingenieros 163). He claims that even the most inferior of the white races are far superior to blacks, and that the latter lack civil capacity and should not be considered human in legal terms (164). He justifies his evaluation on the belief that Africans lack religious ideas (165), and that "they aggregate all the traits that exteriorize their genuinely animal mentality: the attitudes, the gestures, the language, tastes, aptitudes, feelings of a domesticated beast, and, finally, their very *standard of life*" [sic] (163-64). In keeping with this subhuman stereotype, he suggests that the only place where Africans appear happy is in jail and concludes that the abolition of slavery has been a loss for blacks, since slavery assured their existence (169-70).

Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) played a central role in shaping opinions about race in Latin America during the twentieth century. Born the year after Cuba's official abolition of slavery, and five years before its effective abolition, Ortiz' direct witness of slavery was minimal. Even so, his writings provide important insight regarding both the race-based justification of slavery and the post-slavery prejudice that continued to exist against people of African descent. His later writings, such as *El engaño de las razas* (1946), tend to support a belief in racial equality; yet they reflect a marked contradiction with his earlier works, which favor stereotypical racial depictions (Moore 43).

In defense of racial equality, Ortiz claims that the concept of race is arbitrary and aggressive. He criticizes the assertion of a racial hierarchy, both in terms of relative status and in terms of social roles of domination and servitude (Ortiz, *Engaño* 11). He

attributes the belief in a hierarchy of races to the myth of Noah and Ham and claims that this legend was applied to both blacks and Indians in the Americas from the sixteenth century onward (Ortiz, *Engaño* 11-12). One argument that Ortiz uses to repudiate the idea of racial hierarchy is that such a system would be dependent on the existence of pure races—a phenomenon that he claims to be non-existent (378). He adds that race is a concept based on features that are arbitrarily chosen and conditioned by their externality, temporality and conventional discriminatory application (391-92). He claims that there is no such thing as a Hispanic or Latin American race (Godoy 237-38). To further refute the validity of the concept of race, Ortiz quotes a diplomat of Adolf Hitler, one of the most prominent supporters of racist politics, who stated shortly before the Second World War, "We know that race is not a reality, but racismo [sic] an emotive force, real and capable of passionate intensities; but for this precisely we employ it in our totalitarian politics. In this sense, I would add, our arianism and our antijudaism are true" (qtd. in Ortiz, *Engaño* 419). This citation shows that people who are aware of the fallacy of race may still exploit the belief in it for ulterior motives. On a certain level, they may even come to believe in it—if not in terms of its veracity, then in terms of its utility. To an extent, this parallels the mindsets of influential nineteenth-century Cuban thinkers such as Domingo del Monte, who, while opposed to racism on a theoretical basis, still endorsed certain forms of it. An example of this is the proposed diminution of slave importation to Cuba and the deportation of free blacks from Cuba to minimize the effect of cultural and genetic contagion on the metropolitan white class.

Ortiz acknowledges that the symbolic association of the color black has influenced the prejudiced perception of Africans. In many cultures, black has been

associated with ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality, and the Manichean metaphor which associated the contrast between light and darkness with the struggle between good and evil (Jackson 467). Its negative connotations are found in contexts far removed from the nineteenth-century Caribbean. Ancient Greeks associated the color black with death and putrefaction. Its etymological derivations such as "necrology," "necropolis," "necroscopy" and "*necromancia*" (sometimes pronounced "*nigromancia*"), and "*magia negra*" or black magic all evidence the negative meaning assigned to it. During the Middle Ages, the devil was portrayed as black and angels as white (Ortiz, *Engaño* 209).

Negative connotations of blackness were common in the nineteenth-century Caribbean and were even reflected in Cuban anti-slavery novels of this period. In some cases, authors of these novels accepted blacks as inferiors, and their works focused on stereotypical negative traits such as docility, tranquility, and resignation to fate. Further, they did not wish to acknowledge that blacks could be esthetically pleasing. This hesitation led some of them to describe black characters using typically white features, two examples of which are found in the novels *Sab* and *Cecilia Valdez* (Jackson 467). Granted, the title characters of both of these novels were acknowledged to be of mixed racial heritage and would have more specifically been classified as mulattos. Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, the author of *Sab*, discusses the entire color spectrum and focuses on differences between groups such as African-born blacks, creole blacks, free and enslaved blacks, and mulattos (468). In effect she both acknowledges and perpetuates existing beliefs about the veracity and significance of their physical differences. The title character Sab is distinguished from other slaves on the plantation by his literacy and by his attempts to subvert racial and socio-economic divisions through his friendships with

Carlota and Teresa—the daughter and niece of his *criolla* owner (Barreto 1-2). He also develops a filial relationship with an Amerindian woman named Martina, who, due to her unusual talents, is fetishized as a “noble savage” by both Sab and Carlota (2, 5, 7). Yet the duration and degree of his relationships with whites—particularly with Carlota, the object of his affection—are limited by his skin color. Thus, while the novel critiques the limitations imposed by categories of race, it perpetuates them by illustrating Sab’s inability to interact with *criollas* as a fully accepted equal (4, 5, 8). An interesting reflection of the novel’s limited ability to alter existing perceptions of race is the fact that its author Avellaneda owned slaves until she died.

Another aspect of race used to justify the enslavement of blacks and the belief in their inferiority to whites is tangible aspects of their physical appearance. Ortiz does not explicitly express his own opinions about blacks' physical appearance in *El engaño de las razas*, but he does incorporate the opinions of other writers. He acknowledges the popular belief that each race has a peculiar scent and cites the claim by Alejandro Humboldt that races in Latin America are identifiable by scent. He also cites the popular justification for this belief that trained dogs could recognize runaway slaves by their scent. He claims that since ancient times, "a certain odorous and nauseating effluvium" was associated with blacks (Ortiz, *Engaño* 84). However, he acknowledges that this was not common to all blacks. By 1837, the French writer J. H. Guenebault claimed that, even though blacks typically had a "peculiar and disagreeable odor" certain tribes lacked this trait. According to the citation provided by Ortiz, "The cafres do not smell in this manner. Very strong is the smell of the Wolofs and Fulahs; but not as disagreeable as the inhabitants of Senegal and in the blacks of Solofa when they are sweaty. The Wolofs and

Fulahs stink so much that the places through which they pass remain impregnated by their stench for more than a quarter of an hour" (Ortiz, *Engaño* 85).

In addition to symbolic connotations of their skin color and their alleged physiological traits, Ortiz also raises the issue of moral and cultural degeneration, which he claims is more common among blacks than whites. A specific example of what he considers a morally and culturally degenerate behavior may be seen in his statement regarding fetishism: "[T]he practice of fetishism, as one hears said, is *in the very blood* of black Africans" (qtd. in Moore 35). He views religions, political practices, moral codes and sexual norms of African origin as deficient and perverse. On a broader scale, he considers the beliefs and behaviors of blacks, Chinese, and other non-Europeans to be both self-debilitating and a threat to white working classes via the spread of their ideas—or as Ortiz terms them, “infections” (qtd. in 35). Yet his most severe criticisms are aimed at people of African origin. He suggests that animal names used by African-based religious groups such as "The Scorpion" and "The Snake" are "in perfect consonance with the primitive—and almost always black—psyche of their members" (qtd. in 37). Moreover, he promotes their suppression or elimination. This fear of black's cultural influence is echoed by Ortiz' contemporary Jesús Castellanos, who compares Africans to apes and says that in their *comparsa* celebrations "one can detect...the spirit of the primates" (qtd. in 37). It is also reiterated by Ortiz' other contemporary, Luis Palés Matos, who analogizes the black and the ape in his poetry, and revives racist clichés that caricature blacks as primitive, animal-like buffoons (Jackson 470).

Much of Ortiz' criticism of blacks focuses on cultural practices which he deems inferior to those of whites. He deems the prayers, magic spells, and liturgical choruses of

African syncretistic religions in Cuba as primitive and their means of expression as rudimentary. He argues that mulatto poetry did not penetrate Cuban society due partly to its improvisational nature and its reliance on African formal principles. He does not consider African songs part of Cuban national literature (Arnedo 95).

In describing work by mulattos, Ortiz categorizes as black those works, such as religious songs in African languages that maintain African morphology. However, he groups poetry written in Castilian Spanish, as white poetry, even when written by blacks or mulattos, on the basis that it used "white" language. An examples of this is Ortiz' categorization of the poetry of the black nineteenth-century poet Placido—a contemporary of Manzano, since he considers it to be "white" in terms of subject matter, form and feeling" (Arnedo 96).

Ortiz claims that there was no black native literature in America, since no literary forms in African languages had been produced in the Americas (Arnedo 96-97). In the same text, he states, "We have said that we have no entire poems in black languages. Wholly black poetry in subject-matter, conception, rhythm and language does not exist in Cuba outside the non-written hymnals of *santería* and *ñañiguismo*" (97). Ortiz' judgment in this case is interesting, due to its devaluation of oral language. His logo-centric bent is in keeping with the commonly held view of writing as a mark of advanced civilization and the absence of writing as a mark of primitivism. While he acknowledges the existence of certain types of black poetry, he relegates them to an inferior status.

Moreover, he refers to African-derived poetry, along with other customs, art forms and religious beliefs as "ulcers" and "open sores" on the Cuban social "body" which harm Cuba and slow its progress towards a more civilized condition (Moore 35).

From a white, metropolitan perspective, such metaphors refer to cultural blemishes whose elimination is sought through the ongoing project of racial whitening. However, these sores and ulcers may also have a non-pejorative meaning from the perspective of the African diaspora. Like the sores on the body of the Yoruba trickster Legba, they may represent portals between the earth and heaven—the two realms between which Legba relays messages. While the continents and cultures of Africa and America do not correspond with the earth-heaven paradigm of Yoruba cosmology, they do constitute two sides of a cultural and linguistic divide through which communication is often impeded by a failure to recognize and interpret signs. That African-derived cultural practices help to bridge this divide is a fact inadvertently and ironically alluded to by Ortiz, even in his denunciation of them. The double-meanings of Ortiz' images may be coincidental; yet they underscore how a negative signifier may assume a positive signified, depending on the agent who appropriates it and the context in which it is applied.

Although the term "noble savage" has often been used overtly to refer to members of disadvantaged groups who occupied positions of unusual influence, its true referent is not savages but humanity in general. It serves less to elevate the idea of the native or savage than to demote the idea of the nobility. In doing so, it calls into question the hierarchy through which the nobility exercises its power. It also suggests the idea of its opposite, the ignoble savage. In Europe, the idea of the noble savage has been used to attack the systems of privilege, inherited power, and oppression, in which case it serves as a critique of hegemonic agency. On the other hand, the idea of the ignoble savage was used to justify the slave trade—a justification that reinforced the hegemonic agency (White, *Tropics* 191). Another way in which the referent is ambiguous is that it indicates

the potential nobility of the savage, thus implying his ability to acquire agency (White, *Tropics* 192). Savages can be seen as coexisting with “civilized” humanity in two different ways. First, they may be perceived continuously, a perspective that has served as the basis for the attempts at proselytization and conversion (193). On the other hand, they may be perceived as existing contiguously with groups in power, a view that has been used to justify policies of war and extermination (193-94). In both cases, a certain degree of agency is implicit on the part of the savage, since it provides incentive for others to devise ways to control and exploit him for their own benefit. Furthermore, the idea of noble savage constitutes a fetish in which the natives are seen as something monstrous but at the same time desirable, thus motivating efforts of both extermination and redemption (194). The ambiguity of the noble savage—in terms of its referent, the type of relationship between people inside and outside the referent, and their respective aims—plays an important role regarding the issue of agency in autobiographical—and testimonial—writing.

1.3 Dialogism

Dialogism—the continual interaction between different ideas and texts—is present on multiple levels in all three narratives. It can be seen in the racial and ideological identities that are crafted for each narrator, the style of language in each text along with denotative and connotative meanings, the question of each narrator's agency in the crafting of his narrative, the determination of its meaning, the fulfillment of his goal, and the issue of genre. In regard to genre, dialogism can be seen in the competing historiographical and literary influences. As such, it relates to the question of

authenticity. Since a central goal of autobiographical narratives in general—and of testimonials in particular—is to utilize first-person, eye-witness accounts to enhance the credibility of the narrator's truth claim, it would appear that such texts are historical in nature and possess a high degree of authenticity. However, several factors call into question a narrative's authenticity and its achievement of agency for any collaborator. These include the selection and elision of details, the inadvertent changes in the narrator's remembrance and transcription of the story, the revision of the text by editors and translators, and the text's overarching function as a tool of empowerment, albeit an ambivalent empowerment whose intended beneficiary—narrator, editor, or broader reading (and non-reading) public—varies from one collaborator to another. The resulting product, while maintaining certain traits typical of both historical and literary texts, cannot adequately be categorized as either one. But the classification of these texts is not of primary importance for the narrators or their collaborators. Instead, their priority is the achievement of agency necessary to bring about social and political change. The appearance of authenticity in each narrative text is merely a means to this end.

The dialogic principle—a metaphor for the heterogeneity of discourse—is manifest to a certain degree in every text. This principle reflects the intertextual nature inherent in any discourse that results from the mixing of different discourses within it (Bal 64). Its key role in slave narratives is influenced by the range of cultural factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic level, language, literacy, and religion among narrators, writers, editors, and amanuenses. It is also due to the different roles that each of these agents play in the composition of the text. In essence, the dialogic principle—or dialogism—constitutes a type of metonymy on both textual and metatextual levels, due to

the contiguity which it reflects between the different people, cultures, world views, and motives involved in the writing process. However, it may also be said to be—particularly in the case of slave narratives—inherently ironic. This is due to the sharing—and in some cases exchange—of agency between collaborators in the text's composition and readers who ultimately determine its reception; the ironic double intentions of a heteroglot language; the shift in emphasis from experience to remembrance and verbalization; and the alteration of meaning through communication. While such ironic components may cast doubt upon the veracity of slave narratives, they do not necessarily detract from its effectiveness as a tool of empowerment. In some cases, they tend to increase it. For example, the representation of a narrative in another language expands its scope by making it available to a broader audience and by facilitating communication with this audience through familiar linguistic, cultural, and discursive modes. However, such a process gradually shifts control—and in some cases authorship and ownership—of the narrative from the narrator through a series of interlocutors to the culminating figure of the reader or listener.

This negative transition—particularly in terms of the loss of ownership—seems antithetical to the goal of emancipation, which is the principal motive of most slaves in narrating their stories. It also raises the issue of whether slaves' submission of their life-stories to editors who used them for other motives, did not—at least on a figurative level—perpetuate the status quo. In some cases, this could be true. However, in several examples of both Spanish-American and African-American autobiography, the assumption of an inferior position by the autobiographical narrator actually increased her freedom in storytelling, and ultimately her agency as well. One such example is found in

Victoria Ocampo's *Autobiografía*. Here Ocampo, who lacks an established feminist tradition of representation, effectively appropriates voices from the male-authored canon and re-enunciates them through a feminine voice (Molloy, *Face* 75). According to Fiona Parrott, Ocampo's ambition was to "some day manage to write, more or less well, more or less badly, but like a woman" (Parrott 1). She sought to incorporate masculine language in her own text in a dialogic sense, thus distinguishing it from the monologic style typical of masculine discourse. Ocampo sought freedom from the strictures of the male genre; she achieved it partly due to her gender and partly due to her perception as a cultural Other. To an extent, her cultural Otherness is evident in her correspondence with her friend and mentor Virginia Woolf, with whom she is contrasted in an English/Latin American, colonizer/colonized hierarchy (Salomone). In spite of borrowing partly from a masculine and European tradition, she was freed from its strictures due to her differences of gender and culture.

Related to the ambiguity of a narrator's status—particularly in the context of slave narratives—is the concept of the noble savage. While this concept has a broad application that is not limited to any one ethnic group, Stuart Hall identifies it as part of the dualistic, epistemically violent, manner in which blacks are perceived. He elaborates on this mode of perception, stating that it "is both outside and inside, and operates by a process of splitting on both sides of the division—in here as well as out there. That is why it is a question, not only of black-skin, white-skin but of Black-skin, White masks—the internalisation [sic] of the self-as-other" (qtd. in Hagey 106-07). While this type of internalization is related to the idea of mimesis, Hall describes the dualistic, and non-mimetic, manner in which the black subject is constructed by racism as both "noble

savage and violent avenger" (qtd. in Hagey 107). Thus, one may conclude that the dualism inherent in this concept is manifest not only between different groups, but within a single group. Further, this dualism may be perceived as either emulative or agonistic.

The dialogic principle and its effects on agency and authenticity can be observed at various stages and levels in the process of autobiographical expression. At each stage, the discourse undergoes a transformation. In the words of Sylvia Molloy, "Autobiography does not rely on events but on an articulation of those events stored in memory and reproduced through remembrance and verbalization" (Molloy, *Face* 5). It is based on memories of events rather than on events themselves. Memories, even if they are subconscious and non-linguistic, still involve a transformative process due to the memory holder's inclusion of certain details, elision of others, and interpretation of this content from a unique personal perspective. When conscious discursive creation is initiated, the content is further refined. Here, information is deliberately selected—either solely by the narrator, or jointly by the narrator and an interviewer who supplies questions. Even in the absence of an interviewer, the narrator effectively serves as a mediator between his experience, his memories of that experience, and the expression of those memories in language. According to Molloy, "Self-expression is, necessarily, a process of alteration: one speaks through the voice of an other even if that other—as in the case of Ocampo's self-translation—is a simulacrum of oneself" (73). In the role of mediator, the narrator effectively assumes a third-person perspective on what is ostensibly a first-person experience. He must also create another character to occupy the first-person autobiographical role in the text—a character who is a mimetic reproduction, rather than a duplication, of the self.

A similar trend takes place in the allusion to memories of other people in previous generations. Linking memories serves to enhance the autobiographical persona by presenting the autobiographer as a privileged witness in contact with a past that has been lost to the readers. In a way, the process of communal autobiography sheds light on the rememorative process of individual autobiography, since the lack of direct contact with ancestors' experiences in the former case parallels the dependence on the intervening—albeit refining—medium of memory in the latter case. In the case of communal autobiography, the narrator expands her or his own memory by incorporating the memories of others (Molloy, *Face* 161). He appropriates narratives about the experiences of other people and re-expresses them in his own words. In doing so, he imaginatively puts himself in the place of these people in a manner similar to that of a historian. In the words of Hayden White, the historian has

to enter sympathetically into the minds or consciousnesses of human agents long dead, to empathize with the intentions and motivations of actors impelled by beliefs and values that may differ totally from anything the historian might himself honor in his own life, and to understand, even when he cannot condone, the most bizarre social and cultural practices. (White, *Content* 67)

Such empathy—or its appearance at any rate—is present to a high degree in slave narratives, most notably through the acknowledgement of a social hierarchy, which the narrator may accept but does not condone. It is also manifest in references to beliefs and behaviors of other indentured servants whose beliefs and practices fall outside of the narrator's world view, but still constitute a part of his experience and, by extension, the semiotic network to which his narrative pertains.

The distance on the level of consciousness—which the historian must seek to overcome through an imagined empathy with his subjects—is influenced partly by the

passage of time. The time elapsed between an event and its remembrance influences the way in which it is interpreted. In any account of the past—be it autobiographical, historical, or testimonial—there is a temporal gap between an experience and its reporting. This gap produces a fundamental ontological divide that diminishes the account's veracity and reliability (Frisch 27). In the context of testimonies, witnesses have been primarily considered from the perspective of the moment in which they testify, rather than from the moment to which they refer (28). Since the testimony occurs after the experience to which it refers, its speaker may have partially forgotten it. Also, she will have acquired further temporal experience, by which the meaning of her testimony will inevitably be altered. Even if a testimony is written in advance and preserved verbatim until the moment of delivery to an audience, its meaning will change. Thus, the three slave narratives under consideration here—even though they focus primarily on the personal experiences of their narrators—are altered in their meaning due to the temporal shift from the moment of experience to that of delivery.

1.4 Heteroglossia

Another topic related to the temporal gap between an experience and its verbal expression is heteroglossia: the dialogic interaction of different discourses. It involves "a perpetual struggle between centripetal institutional forces that strive for standardization and language's inherent centrifugal tendency to diversify and fragment, thereby producing a linguistic and ideological heteroglossia" (Neubauer 539). Implicit in such a struggle is the issue of hegemony on both cultural and textual levels—a central factor in both the debate regarding slavery and the verbal expression of slaves' experiences.

Heteroglossia also relates to the idea of intersubjectivity—that a text's meaning is based on relations between different interlocutors rather than on an individual subject in isolation (Frisch 32). In his book, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Mikhail Bakhtin further defines heteroglossia as "another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way." He thus portrays it as a double-voiced discourse that serves two speakers with two different intentions: the character's direct intention, and the author's refracted intention (Bakhtin 324). In novels, heteroglossia is usually personified through individual characters. To a degree, this is true in testimonials, since the latter are usually written collaboratively by a narrator and an editor whose languages, cultures, socioeconomic levels, and worldviews differ. However, heteroglossia at the personal level is inevitably submerged in a social heteroglossia and reconceptualized through it (326).

Heteroglossia and the intersubjectivity that it creates are not limited to the competing influences in a text's formation. They are also shaped by a text's reception as a result of personal, cultural, linguistic, and temporal differences between the text and its receiver. In her discussion of heteroglossia in the context of the novel, Maria Shevtsova claims that the novel is acculturated by the history that comes after it. This occurs because the readers, who interpret and—in doing so—influence the meaning of a novel, are themselves influenced by the social semioses of their own historical contexts (Shevtsova 754). By being "refracted" through a new lens, which necessarily sees differently than the lens involved in the original textual creation, the novel—or any other text—is modified. This perspective is reiterated by various thinkers including Sarmiento,

who refers to reading as an act of translation (Molloy, *Face* 26). It also underscores the idea that the transfer of agency extends beyond the production of a written text.

While the agency of the receiver is applicable to any kind of text, it is a conscious and necessary component in the process of testimony. As Andrea Frisch points out, "unlike strictly autobiographical utterance, testimony in general requires others in order to come into being as testimony" (Frisch 30-31). This is true because in order to offer testimony, or bear witness, about something, there must be an audience to hear or read what is communicated. The dialogical principle inherent in testimony was acknowledged as far back as the Middle Ages, where a witness was thought not to have a subjective or objective point of view, but an intersubjective one. This tradition observed that the meaning of a testimony was based on relations among persons and never an individual subject in isolation (32). It might even be said that the perspective of the witness was influenced by his anticipation of the audience's expectations, and that his testimony was partially crafted in response to these.

The reception of a text inevitably contains certain risks. Just as agency is transferred from one entity to another in the processes of remembering, narrating, writing, editing, and reading, so too is possession of the text. Each act that requires the intervention of another person in order to move the text through its next phase also entails an act of submission through the relinquishment of power over the text. Even for Juan Francisco Manzano, who was both literate and an author of some fame, his autobiography was repeatedly manipulated by others (Molloy, *Serf* 396). For Abū Bakr eṣ Ṣadīq, whose literacy was rudimentary in Arabic and non-existent in English, and Esteban Montejo who was illiterate, further mediation was necessary. By depending on

white men for the writing—and ultimately the reading—of their testimonial accounts, each narrator jeopardized the agency that he sought to achieve (Molloy, *Serf* 397). While Madden, who assisted both Abū Bakr and Manzano, was sympathetic to the plight of slaves, his main goal in writing and publishing their testimonies was not to facilitate their emancipation. Barnet, who elicited, transcribed, edited and published Montejo's account, did not interview his subject until over half a century after slavery's abolition in Cuba. Thus, Montejo is unlikely to be the intended beneficiary of Barnet's intervention. The paternalistic mindset of Madden, Barnet, and possibly of other white collaborators, in some ways perpetuated a more subtle form of the very subordination that the slave narratives decried. This transition is reminiscent of the shift occurring in the use of heteroglot language by a prose writer. By using words that already carry the social intentions of other people, the writer makes them serve his own intentions and, in doing so, makes them serve a new master (Bakhtin 299-300).

An important difference between the genres of autobiography and testimonial is that the former tends to focus on the private sphere, whereas the latter deals with the public sphere. In this sense, a testimonial may also be viewed as a depersonalized autobiography (Achugar 59). Another factor that contributes to the depersonalized nature of a testimonial is that it tends to serve as a form of autobiography of the unlettered—one who is either illiterate or who lacks access to and/or control over the spaces of historiography and communication (58). Whether dealing with an exemplary story or a denunciation, a testimony provides a lettered authorization of information that has been left out of the official history.

Authentication is another feature of the testimonial that relates to the issue of authorization. Unlike social, historical, and testimonial novels that are authenticated through real, documented facts, the non-novelistic testimonial depends on a 'natural confidence' which readers place in it (Achugar 66). In all testimonies, but particularly in those whose narrators are unlettered, the registry of the voice of the Other plays an important role (60). Such a voice can only be achieved via the effect of orality. There are multiple factors that may contribute to the sense of orality in a text. These include grammatical or syntactical changes, vernacular, flashback, rhythm, and various structural elements such as a non-chronological narration, and beginning *in medias res* (68). Another feature that helps to highlight the effect of orality is the allegedly transparent voice of the lettered mediator, against which the voice of the Other stands in contrast. The presence of these two voices—that of the Other and that of the lettered mediator—is a key factor that distinguishes testimony from other genres (67).

While classification as a novel is not applicable to all slave narratives, many slave narratives do possess stylistic traits that are associated with the process of novelization. These include the parodic stylizations of other 'canonized' genres, the ability for self-criticism, and the juxtaposition of different discourses that results in heteroglossia (Bakhtin 6, 12). They also include what Bakhtin terms as the three basic characteristics which distinguish the novel from other genres: its stylistic multi-dimensionality in connection with a multi-linguaged consciousness; a radical change in the temporal coordinates of the literary image; a new freedom in the structuring of literary images that allows for maximum contact with contemporary reality (11). These new delimitations allow for the incorporation of other genres, both literary and non-literary (33). Further,

they facilitate the novel's self-critical, metatextual nature (Bakhtin 39). William Andrews observes that genres which undergo the process of novelization become more free, indeterminate, and open-ended (Russell 53). He adds that the 'broken form,' as he calls it, is engaged in liberating the discursive principle from the discourse itself (54). The broken form is a particularly apt metaphor for such change in the context of slave narratives since, at the metatextual level, it parallels the more tangible physical sufferings experienced by slaves. While the assimilation of Africans into the white hegemonic system was largely involuntary, the adaptability that they enhanced during their enslavement facilitated their ability to coexist with other ethnic and socioeconomic groups, both during and after slavery. In some ways, it also facilitated a more figurative emancipation from the strictures of the prevailing literary tendencies.

An important topic related to the ambiguity of a text's genre—and one that plays a central role in the African-American canon—is the trope of irony. Heather Russell claims that irony and satire are central features of the practice of African-American vernacular signifying (Russell 35). In her opinion, some African-American authors use a limiting form to further mask and encode their ideological point of view in the context of an anonymous autobiographical or fictional narrative (37-38). However, such association with an existing genre can be superficial, since the creation of new norms will ultimately give rise to a new genre. While the adoption of one genre may serve to mask or encode an author's unique perspective, such a perspective may ultimately bring about change in the genre itself. To put it another way, while a familiar form may be used to mask changes in content, such changes will inevitably bring about a change in the form. In the

case of African-American and Afro-Caribbean literature, the trickster figure is a key component of this process.

1.5 Trickster Figures of the Yoruba and African Diasporic Canons

The trickster figure is an important concept associated with both social adaptation and political subversion in African and African-derived cultures. Referred to as Legba in the Fon culture of West Africa and as Esu-Eleghara in the nearby Yoruba culture—it is recognized by African-American scholars for its key role in the dialogic process. According to Heather Russell, the Yoruba consider Esu-Eleghara to be "the god of the crossing," "the gateway god," and "the divine linguist, vested with the power to govern over hermeneutic and heuristic processes" (Russell 9). In an even broader reference to the African diaspora, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. states that the Yoruban Esu-Eleghara is "Our metaphor for the uncertainties of explication, for the open-endedness of any literary text...Esu rules the process of disclosure, a process that is never-ending, that is dominated by multiplicity. Esu is discourse upon a text; it is the process of interpretation he rules" (Gates, *Signifying* 21; qtd. in Russell 9).

While disclosure often refers to the ongoing process of interpretation, it may also denote the selection of material for inclusion in a text. In this respect, the narrator, who in autobiographical slave narratives is also the protagonist, would appear to fulfill the role of Esu-Eleghara or Legba. Indeed, some protagonists are read as embodiments of the Legba principle, in the role of an androgynous inhabitant of the crossroads and master of signification, someone who tells semantic falsehoods, but expresses deeper rhetorical truths (Russell 54). Legba's power is found in its ability to maintain a balance of crossed

or contrary forms and forces (Russell 54-55). However, Legba may share this role with others who influence the choice of material included in a narrative, either through the questioning of a narrator, or through the editing and revision of his answers. To a certain extent, any collaborators in the creative process, including writers, editors, and translators could be said to occupy this role.

While the visualization and personification of the Legba figure allow for its easy incorporation into African folklore, it is primarily important as a rhetorical trope that acknowledges the inherently dialogic nature of texts. Dialogism encompasses the competing influences of different cultures, languages, and world views; yet it is also manifest in the seemingly oppositional influences of creation and interpretation. The extent to which creation and interpretation of meaning are opposed should be qualified, since, in the execution of either task, the other task is always present. The inextricable relation between creation and interpretation is further evidenced in stories that are based on memory. Communal story-telling traditions evidence the fact that the memories in question are not those of the final narrator. Some narratives emphasize the multi-generational structure of the story-telling apparatus, and may even satirize its diminishing effect on the veracity of stories that are retold. However, even in texts where the narration and the memories that it entails are limited to a single speaker, the communication of memories is still a multi-step process that inevitably involves both the interpretation of memories and the creative process of expressing them via language. If a significant period of time transpires between the experiences and their verbal expression, then the step of remembrance is added, along with inherent changes in meaning.

Closely related to the Legba figure is the concept of *àshe*, loosely defined as "the power to make things happen." It is grounded in the achievement of tangible results, in terms of the agency that it grants (Russell 106). Such agency might be expected to be achieved by the narrator of a testimonial, since this person is normally the one most desperately seeking to bring about change. However, it may also be realized by others involved in the creation and reception of the text. Russell claims that "The revolutionary power of *àshe* to transcend the discursive hegemony of Western epistemology and its attendant esthetic constructs opens upon readerly suspension of the desire for the Grand Narrative" (105). *Àshe* has a revolutionary tendency in regard to the rules of a dominant system. Its fulfillment on the part of the reader depends on the reader's replacement of the erroneous concept of a single true history with the acknowledgement of multiple histories, each of which possesses a certain degree of subjectivity. However, it is not relegated to the process of literary or historical interpretation. Instead, its most important realization is in one's response to what one reads. Russell states that "The *àshe* of the text, the power-to-make-things-happen, in the final analysis is vested in what we do with the recognition that the materially manifest oppressive operations of race, class, and color have as devastating consequences as the 'institutionalized histories' and epistemological formations that help to keep them firmly in place" (106). Here she acknowledges the centrality of written texts in influencing human behavior. Yet she also denotes a shift in agency from texts and authors to readers. She portrays reading—and with it, Legba's function in interpretation—as a means to an end: the empowerment of the reader in a post-reading context (163). In many—though not all—slave narratives, the emancipation

of the narrator depended on an active reader who was motivated into action on behalf of the former, based on what she had read (Russell 158).

The concept of fixed, inscribed, unchanging, individual stories charting the experiences of protagonists who achieve self-actualization by the narrative's end is largely a Western construct (Russell 114). This would suggest that the transfer of agency—and, in effect, the loss of agency on the part of the protagonist—is generally expected in the African storytelling tradition, whereas the fulfillment of the protagonist's goals is not. This corresponds with the general aim of African-American literature to empower its readers, but it does so with an ironic consequence for the protagonist. One might say that the protagonist's sacrifice on the textual level serves to achieve a didactic victory on the metatextual level. The ability to educate and empower readers constitutes a type of agency. However, it raises the question of who is in possession of such agency—the editor, who finalizes the version of the narrative to be presented to the reading public; the narrator, who in many slave narratives, is also the protagonist; or both. In such cases, the narrator's agency is not entirely lost, but rather transferred from one textual level to another.

In some African-American literature, the principal aim is to call up the past, guarantee an ancestral presence, maintain its longevity, and in doing so, transform readers by moving them out of the delimiting Western epistemological tradition (Russell 161). Thus, if a slave narrative alludes to previous generations or traditions, it may do so with the goal of perpetuating African culture—as well as the ideas and values associated with it—in the face of colonial hegemony. In this case, the subversion of the Western tradition is achieved via a reversion to an African one. What makes this particularly

ironic in the case of slave narratives is that the freedom and agency that they achieve on a metatextual level often eludes their protagonists, both on the textual level of the narrative and in real life. The transfer of agency in slave narratives is ironic in other ways as well. If agency is passed from a narrator of an inferior caste to a writer, amanuensis, or editor of the prevailing social echelon, then it seems to reinforce the very hierarchy that the narrative critiques. Even if the ultimate recipients of agency are readers, it is uncertain whether their empowerment was sought by the narrator. If the post-reading empowerment is realized in a manner different from the intention of the narrator, then it sheds doubt on his or her ability to influence others through storytelling.

In a number of ways, the shift in agency relates to the rhetorical figure of the trickster, since in African and African-American storytelling traditions, this figure plays a crucial role in the both production and interpretation of texts. Regarding production, the trickster of African legends rarely transmits a message in its pure form, but rather adapts it to suit his whim. In this respect, he is reminiscent of the African *griot*, or communal storyteller. The *griot*, who functions as a type of communal memory, constructs his tale, not as an owner, but as a medium through which communal language, knowledge, and ideology pass. In effect, he embodies a collective consciousness and he is closely tied to West African notions of orality, in which histories always belong to a varied community. Russell goes so far as to suggest that the function of the *griot* as a medium through which stories pass parallels the roles not only of black narrators but also of white editors and translators (Russell 114). That said, it is important to consider that the *griot* in real life—like the trickster of legend—possesses the freedom to make changes. His stories, like those of the trickster, incorporate archaic formulas and may contain secret meanings, but

they do not represent historical reality in a matter-of-fact way (Marvin 589). Further, after passing through the intermediary of a *griot* or a trickster, such stories are corrupted in terms of both their content and their deviation from their original authors' wills.

Inherent in the *griot's* role as a storyteller is the notion of performance. Performance is particularly relevant to tricksters because of their capacity to embody multivocality. One manifestation of multivocality is the tricksters' dialogic, double-voiced nature. Another is their ability to play different roles in the context of a performance. In a traditional oral performance, the teller plays not only the leading character roles but also those of the narrator and commentator. In effect, listeners receive criticism in addition to narrative. Since performed narratives are inevitably tied to the political and social exigencies of the moment, such conditions will influence the roles that tricksters play, as well as any nuances that they choose to employ (Monsma 85-86).

In its mediating capacity, the trickster is not an original author; yet it is still closely tied to the processes of both creation and interpretation (Tucker 181). In a manner reminiscent of the Greek god Hermes, the African god Legba supposedly reads the language of the gods and translates it for the people (181-82). In this context, he has the ability to interpret, and thus, to create a new text that is influenced by both his interpretation and his individual goals. Since this process is at least partly evaluative in nature, the trickster may be said to fulfill the metatextual function of critic. Gates sees the trickster at the crossroads as a metaphor for the African-American critic (Monsma 83). As border crossers, tricksters mirror—and in doing so, reveal—the ways in which humans construct and reconstruct cultures. They elicit the possibility for misunderstanding on the part of readers, even while encouraging them to participate in

the creation of meaning (Monsma 84). Gates also sees the trickster as a central figure in African-American literature, as can be seen in his commentary, quoted by Lefever:

Of the music, myths, and forms of performance that the African brought to the Western Hemisphere...one specific trickster figure [Esu-Elegbara]...recurs with startling frequency in black mythology in Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. This figure appears in black cultures with such frequency that we can think of it as a repeated theme or topos" (qtd. in Lefever 324).

Gates claims that as the figure of Echu-Elegua moved from Cuba to the United States, he was transformed into the secular myth of "The Signifying Monkey." He describes this figure as distinctly African-American and surmises that it was derived from Cuban mythology that generally depicts Echu-Elegua with a monkey at his side (Lefever 325). In spite of this distinction, Esu-Elegbara or Legba in Africa and their New World manifestations of Echu-Elegua and the Signifying Monkey all possess traits that are generally shared by trickster figures: "individuality, satire, parody, irony, magic, indeterminacy, openendedness, ambiguity, sexuality, chance, uncertainty, disruption and reconciliation, betrayal and loyalty, closure and disclosure, encasement and rupture" (326). Gates adds that for African Americans, the Monkey provides "chiastic fantasies of reversal of power relationships" (Gates, *Signifying* 59; qtd. in Lefever 326).

Beyond simply being a common theme or image in African and African-American literature, Gates considers Esu to represent the master trope within the black tradition, which he identifies as Signifyin(g) and Signification, and distinguishes from the white forms of signifying and signification (Lefever 326-27). Gates elaborates on this idea by describing the role of the trickster and the various literary tropes that he subsumes:

The ironic reversal of a received racist image of the black as simian-like, the Signifying Monkey—he who dwells at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language—is our trope for repetition and revision, indeed, is our trope of chiasmus itself, repeating and simultaneously reversing in one deft, discursive act. If Vico and Burke, or Nietzsche, Paul de Man, and Harold Bloom, are correct in identifying "master tropes," then we might think of these as the "master's tropes," and of signifying as the slave's trope, the trope of tropes, as Bloom characterizes metalepsis, 'a trope-reversing trope, a figure of a figure.' Signifying is a trope that subsumes other rhetorical tropes, including metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony (the 'master' tropes) and also hyperbole, litotes, and metalepsis (Bloom's supplement to Burke). To this list, we could easily add aporia, chiasmus, and catachresis, all of which are used in the ritual of signifying. (Gates, *Blackness* 686-87)

From Gates' description, several conclusions can be drawn. The trickster figure, which, in the context of African-American literature, has been dubbed the signifying monkey, is considered to surpass the four so-called master tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony—as identified by prominent white philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such a shift in the rhetorical hierarchy provides a symbolic parallel to the increase in agency achieved by African and African-American writers through the use of the trickster figure. This shift in status is reiterated by Gates' satiric pun on the word "master." He appropriates this word from white philosophers, who used it to reflect the alleged superiority of four tropes that took precedence over—and, according to some scholars, subsumed—all other tropes. Gates believes that this hierarchy is reversed by the trickster figure—more specifically, the signifying monkey—which, if true, negates the validity of the word "master." In his categorization of different tropes, Gates juxtaposes the word "master" with "slave" to connote in a social context the type of change that he is addressing in literature. According to Lefever, Gates views the trickster as the "master" trope of the black tradition. Gates' own description, however, indicates that the trickster figure is not reducible to a single trope. It is probably more

correct to refer to the trickster as a personified image associated with the practice of black signification, in which multiple tropes are exploited, but no single trope prevails.

If true, this statement may have important epistemological implications. Hayden White, in his books *Metahistory* and *Tropics of Discourse*, elaborates on the concept of four master tropes and their applications in the fields of literary criticism, historiography, and philosophy of history. This concept is thought to provide the basis for a hierarchy of all tropes and to reflect the potential for metaphoric evolution inherent in both individuals and cultures. Prior to the four stages associated with tropes, there is thought to exist a pre-trope or 'literal' stage in which everything is interpreted at face value. The four stages all deal with non-literal interpretation and each is considered more sophisticated and more abstract than the ones before it (Nilson 268).

The hierarchy of the four master tropes is considered by some scholars to parallel the development of consciousness in both individuals and cultures. The philosopher Giambattista Vico concluded that these tropes correspond with the stages through which an individual must progress in order to achieve abstract thought. Kenneth Burke suggested that the four master tropes subsume all other rhetorical devices and all classical *topoi* (D'Angelo 32). An example of the application of tropes on a cultural level is Hegel's division of history into four stages of cultural development, beginning with the ancient Far East and culminating with the displacement of Roman dominance by Christianity (White, *Metahistory* 124-25, 128-29). This transition—which, in Hegel's view, corresponded with the master trope of irony—was attributed by him to Christianity's ironic denial both of the efficacy of military force and of the value of formal relationships which had facilitated the Roman conquest up to that point. In

Hegel's view, the cycle of tropes was renewed with the reinstatement of the metaphoric mindset in a historical context pervaded by a Christian influence and the struggles to which this gave rise at the beginning of the Middle Ages (White, *Metahistory* 124-25). The return of a metaphoric consciousness is thought to constitute a rebirth of innocence, albeit in a new context (346). This type of cyclical collective development may occur over a span of multiple cultures, within the context of an individual culture, or within the psyche of a single person. The advancing modes of thought reflected in the four master tropes have also been said to parallel the four basic stages of cognitive psychological development identified by Jean Piaget—sensorimotor, representational, operational, and logical—as well as similar, but differently named stages identified by previous researchers (White, *Tropics* 12).

White notes that, in addition to the hierarchical relationship between the four master tropes, with irony being the culminating trope that ultimately subsumes and undermines the other three, they are also cyclical. As such, the ironic perspective, which had previously called into question the validity of earlier, more primitive and less self-critical perspectives will, in turn, become the new metaphoric perspective. In this role, it will eventually be replaced by other perspectives in a perpetual *ricorso* (Korhonen 37). White claims that there were no epistemological grounds for discriminating among various prefigurations of historical reality, and that what constitutes "reality" or "epistemology" depends on the prefiguration from which it is viewed. In *Metahistory*, White defines irony as a trope that "provides a linguistic paradigm of a mode of thought which is radically self critical with respect not only to a given characterization of the world of experience but also to the very effort to capture adequately the truth of things in

language" (Korhonen 37; White, *Metahistory* 37). While he identifies irony as the superior trope, he recognizes both its limited capacity for interpretation and the transience of its hegemony, since it is merely one of four ideological points of departure available (Korhonen 42). By seeing the relationship between the master tropes as perpetually cyclical, and thus denying any kind of permanent hierarchy among them, White touches on the issue of epistemological irony. In the words of another author, White believes that "epistemological irony is an attitude that questions the historian's ability to offer a representation of the past that meets the standards of truthfulness set by metaphorical, metonymical, and synecdochical worldviews" (37). Herman Paul proposes that White's dilemma is essentially a conflict between two different types of irony—ideological and epistemological. The intra-ideological conflict is an attempt to overthrow the monopoly of ideological irony by means of epistemological irony (42). In a figurative sense, the trickster could represent epistemological irony, since it raises the same types of questions about the ability of any representation to meet standards of truthfulness, and the ability of any rhetorical trope to take precedence over others.

One may note that an ironic worldview, like the worldviews that correspond with other three so-called master tropes, is unable to provide a completely accurate representation of reality. However, the concept of epistemological irony may help to explain two important issues in the context of slave narratives: truth claim and agency. First, since the meaning of each narrative is changed as it passes through each of the three basic stages in the creative and interpretative processes—narrating, writing, and reading—its authenticity as a historical document gradually diminishes. Second, the participants at each stage acquire agency by co-creating, interpreting, and reacting to the

text. Nevertheless, as the literary creation of a participant at one stage is reinterpreted, misinterpreted, revised, overwritten, or signified upon by someone at a later stage, the agency of the earlier participant is diminished. The prevailing hierarchy that becomes apparent here is not one involving rhetorical tropes, but agents in the processes of textual creation and interpretation. The agency of the reading audience is necessarily limited by their inability to intervene in the tangible production of the text. However, those in the editorial stage of the writing process tend to have greater agency than those before them, largely because they have the final say in how the text is written. When one considers that those who occupy editorial positions in the production of slave narratives tend to belong to the dominant class in the socio-cultural milieu, it appears that the agency sought through the act of narration by both current and former slaves is ephemeral at best and, in the end, is largely appropriated by their white collaborators. One might even infer that the role of the trickster is transferred from the former group to the latter.

Even if editors do appropriate some agency from the texts' narrators, it is possible that certain aspects of the narrators' agency remain intact. More obvious examples of this include the narrators' ability to communicate details of their lives and cultures—two aspects which are very difficult to eliminate entirely from an autobiographical narrative, even when they are misconstrued. A less obvious example is the use of discursive strategies and rhetorical devices—some possessing cultural or religious overtones—of which the narrative's reader is unaware. That these are rarely alluded to or explained in the target text makes them less detectable and potentially more effective in communicating covert messages—of subaltern survival or anti-metropolitan resistance—to a narrowly defined audience.

Many subaltern groups—the Yoruba among them—utilize a strategy of partial assimilation, through which syncretism occurs on the part of the subaltern culture without submission to the metropolitan one. In the resulting discourse of compromise, some of the subaltern signifiers may adopt the appearance of the metropolitan or colonizing culture, but the signifieds do not. The Yoruba-Western discourse consists of rhetorical manipulations of the dominant model. These manipulations may appear to be flawed versions of the dominant discourse, when in actuality they signify defensively upon it (Piedra, *Monkey* 371). The BaKongo culture, which is also explicitly alluded to in the narrative, had a strategy similar to that of the Yoruba. It rejects the foreign codes of colonizers by feeding the latter only part of its own system of signification, or with adaptable subsystems which could easily be adapted to their demands. Related to this is the close association in BaKongo culture of two concepts: *nzambi* or certain unity, and *funza* or uncertain plurality. There are several systems which serve to establish a relationship of meaning between these two ideas. However, the one most relevant to Cuban culture is that of *ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga* and *simbi*. In Yoruba cosmology, *ndoki* is a witch or person who materializes the relationship between the known and unknown by creating fetishes. In doing so, it alters the natural order. *Nkisi* is the fetish itself. It serves as a positive but passive link between the individual and tradition. *Nganga* refers to a doctor or similar expert who manipulates fetishes in an attempt to restore the natural order (374). *Simbi* is an omen whose appearance serves as a negative but active link between the individual and tradition (374-75). The spirit often materializes with monkey characteristics to warn believers that traditional relationships are being challenged (375). *Simbi* is sometimes referred to as the spirit of the waters (374).

While all of these concepts have traditional roles in the realm of magic, they may also be interpreted mythopoetically in the context of literature (Piedra, *Monkey* 374). It is likely that they have direct applications in the compositional process of slave narratives. José Piedra suggests that three of these terms relate to specific elements in the process of composition: *ndoki* as the domain of the artist and critic, *nkisi* as the symbolic relationship between signifier and signified, *simbi* as the challenger of signification. Although he makes no mention of *nganga* in this context, *nganga* does have an esthetic correspondence with the domain of the editor. Moreover, it is also possible that these four concepts correspond with the four master tropes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. An understanding of this is important in the context of these slave narratives because it contextualizes a theory of European origin in the interpretation of Afro-Caribbean literature. The connection between the Yoruba concepts, the agents in the writing process, and the four master tropes should also help to elucidate how each narrator achieves agency via the role of the trickster, in spite of their editors' multi-layered and seemingly overpowering intervention. Somewhat ironically, they may also clarify how editors sometimes achieve agency in their own right.

While the literature of the Yoruba and their descendents in colonial contexts is heteroglossic in its attempt to assimilate without submitting to the dominant culture, the genre of ethnography is also inherently dialogical. According to James Clifford, ethnographies always represent a dialogue, even if they are not dialogical in structure (Clifford 134). In fictions of dialogue, the person being interviewed by the ethnographer is seen as a representative of his or her culture via the text. Such a phenomenon is synecdochic since the ethnographer uses the text of an individual to represent the quality

or essence of a broader context. Ethnographic texts are sometimes considered to be instruments of authority exploited by a metropolitan or colonizing culture for the purpose of dominating a subaltern or colonized culture. To resist the trend of favoring authority, such a text must utilize fiction to maintain the strangeness of the Other's voice as well as the contingencies of the dialogue itself (Clifford 135).

Ethnography may contain indigenous statements whose meanings must be interpreted on terms different from those of the ethnographer. In this sense, ethnography possesses an inherent double-voicedness, a trait that incidentally is central both to Yoruba-Western discourse in particular and to African-American discourse in general. Incumbent in this double-voicedness are the phenomena of different levels of meaning and of plural authorship, which allows each collaborator the status of an independent enunciator. The idea of plural authorship provides the ethnographer with an executive position via his research interest. It also challenges the typically Western concept that a text is created by a single author (Clifford 140). Related to the idea of plural authorship is that of plural readership. In other words, the elimination of monological authority in ethnographic texts enhances their ability to address different types of readers. The meaning interpreted by one group of readers may be that intended by the ethnographer. Yet the meaning received by another group may go against the grain of the dominant voice (141). This may be the goal of the interviewee.

Before providing a close analysis of the narrative itself, it is necessary to show how the four Yoruba meta-tropes—*ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga* and *simbi*—relate to the four master tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony—and to the process of composition. Such a correspondence may already have been alluded to implicitly by

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his claim that black slave tropes may easily be compared to the master tropes identified by Vico, Nietzsche, Burke, and Bloom (Gates, *Signifying* 86). While Gates identifies several tropes including chiasmus (44) and the Signifying Monkey (128) as crucial in both slave narratives and the broader African-American literary corpus, he never specifies which slave tropes correspond with the so-called "master" tropes, nor does he make any reference to the four aforementioned Afro-Caribbean tropes that are derived from the Yoruba culture.

In any case, the connections between the Afro-Caribbean tropes and the master tropes are important for several reasons. First, they indicate fundamental similarities between what at first appear to be two very different modes of thought and, thus, help to dispel the belief that one system is inherently superior or inferior to the other. Second, they provide a set of tools to help readers understand and appreciate the complexity of Yoruba literature originating in Africa and its outgrowths in slave communities in the New World. This complexity refers primarily to the following factors: the use of rhetorical devices whose figurative meanings exceed those of the written text; the existence of meta-fiction, which may include multiple levels of narrative (mimesis), commentary on the narrative (diegesis), and a combination of both of these types of discourse (diataxis); a reflexive self-awareness seen not only in a knowledge of and loyalty to its origins, but also in an attempt to integrate itself into new cultural thought systems without giving up its core values. Third, the proposed connection with the four master tropes provides insight into how literature in general—and slave narratives in particular—reflect relations between different social classes, their potential for change, and ultimately their indeterminacy.

None of the three narratives analyzed in this dissertation uses the four master tropes to represent stages of psycho-social development on the part of an individual or community—an idea applied to a variety of literary and historical texts by leading nineteenth-century historians and philosophers of history. However, they bear significant parallels with participants, discourse, and the relationships between and among these two groups in the compositional process of slave narratives. As a result, they could help readers to better understand issues regarding the agency and truth claims of collaborators involved in the compositional process.

In his article, "From Monkey Tales to Cuban Songs: On Signification," José Piedra explores a phenomena that he refers to as "the mythology of compromise" and analyzes examples in Egyptian, Greek, Indian, and Celtic cultures, in addition to the Yoruba culture in Africa and Yoruba-derived cultures in the Americas, the last two of which occupy the majority of his focus (Piedra, *Monkey* 362). After acknowledging the necessity of imitating dominant European—and more specifically Spanish—codes in order to realize national communication in Spanish America, he carries out a detailed analysis of how such imitation is carried out in a manner that placates cultural censors while maintaining a message's integrity. He points out that such mimicry of the master code generally entails strict rules regarding the use of signifiers, yet relative freedom in the case of signifieds (361). While submission to any type of cultural code at the outset may seem counterproductive to subalterns struggling against metropolitan oppression, Piedra indicates that a refusal to compromise with the master code has often led to further marginalization of the subaltern's culture and values through their relegation to folkloric status. In effect, such subalterns have become more dependent on the master code (362).

Piedra also emphasizes the central role of the monkey figure in most mythologies of compromise, along with its general purpose of challenging interpreters and the process of interpretation (Piedra, *Monkey* 362). One reason for the monkey's usefulness in such contexts is its own ambiguity as a sign of either submission or challenge. Members of the Western metropolitan class are likely to view the monkey's principle of esthetics as an imperfect imitation of official codes. Others may see it as a sign of syncretism. Marginalized people may see it as a reversed image of the system of signification. Piedra further claims that all mythological systems are centered on humans' obsession with signification, and have a deified figure who mediates the sharing of knowledge and challenges the manipulation of texts (363). These two mediated processes bring to mind the common pairing of knowledge and language, yet such a pairing is not straightforward. While most mythologies portray knowledge as a divine gift, its proper acquisition is hindered by humans' use of language to approximate it. There is always a compromise between language and the knowledge that it attempts—or appears to attempt—to convey (364). The deeper a meaning, the more covert and ambiguous its expression (362). In systems where the mediating figure is represented by a monkey, the monkey's status as a being that is playful yet unpredictable, and human-like yet subhuman, enhances its liminality, its ability to challenge interpretation without appearing to do so, and its effectiveness as a trickster. What follows is a synopsis of Piedra's explanation of the four Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes—*ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga* and *simbi*—and an interpretation of their correspondence with the four master tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony.

1.6 *Ndoki*

Among the Yoruba and diasporic communities in the Caribbean, *ndoki* refers to a witch or other person who brings about the relationship between the known and the unknown by creating fetishes. In doing this, *ndoki* effectively alters the natural order (Piedra, *Monkey* 374). In a literary context, Piedra associates *ndoki* with the domain of the artist and critic—the two figures that play chief roles in determining the meaning of a text. In both contexts *ndoki* refers to one who gathers ingredients, mixes them together in order to achieve a transfer of knowledge, and ultimately reconfigures the manner in which reality is perceived.

Ndoki corresponds with the trope of metaphor. Since *ndoki* refers to an agent, it is in keeping with the formist mode of explanation. This mode emphasizes agents, agencies, and acts over the contexts in which they arise; thus it corresponds with the idea that editors possess agency, in spite of the ambiguity regarding their roles as artists or critics. Formism is traditionally matched with metaphoric representation (White, *Metahistory* 14). It aims to identify the unique traits of entities in the historical field at the levels of class, genre, and type (13-14). It tends to make generalizations about categories and sometimes about historical processes as a whole (14). However, formism is also dispersive in that its generalizations tend to lack conceptual precision (15). *Ndoki*, like metaphor, is representational via the comparison of one object to another.

The category of *ndoki* includes several types of agents—witches who craft spells, artists who craft texts (or relations between signifiers and signifieds), and critics who interpret, critique, and/or revise texts. However, in many respects these three categories of agents bear little in common, a fact that may reflect the lack of conceptual precision

typical of formism. *Ndoki* is also similar to metaphor in that it provides imprecise images of a narrator who expresses himself within the confines of existing paradigms and hierarchies (White, *Metahistory* 36).

1.7 *Nkisi*

In non-literary contexts, the second meta-trope, *nkisi*, refers to a fetish or hex that is acted upon by the *ndoki*. Due to the importance of sorcery in African and African-derived social structures, such fetishes or hexes and the specialists who casted or cured them were feared by both slaves and masters (Reis 61). It is partly for this reason that the trope of *nkisi* is so influential in both popular and literary contexts. On an intangible, epistemological level, *nkisi* refers to a positive but passive link between the individual and tradition (Piedra, *Monkey* 374). Piedra associates it with the symbolic relationship between the signifier and the signified. In a broad sense, both tangible and intangible connotations of *nkisi* may be said to parallel the concept of a text.

In terms of master tropes, *nkisi* corresponds with metonymy. One similarity between these two concepts is that the inherent function of metonymy as a part which represents a whole is based on a relationship between a signifier and a signified—the definition of *nkisi* provided by Piedra. The mechanistic world view that corresponds with metonymy tends to be more reductive than metaphor (White, *Metahistory* 16, 36; White, *Tropics* 73). Its reductionist tendency is evident in its basic function of representing a whole entity via one of its parts. This tendency can also be seen in metonymy's reduction of one part of a whole to the level of an aspect or function of another part of that whole. Common examples of this include agent-act and cause-effect relationships (White,

Metahistory 35). Some of *nkisi*'s metonymic qualities can be seen in the magical properties attributed to it in Yoruba culture. Here, *nkisi* is defined as "a ritual object invested with otherworldly power, allowing it to affect special spiritual and material functions in the world" (Young 110). It is also described as "something that hunts down illness and chases it away from the body." Both definitions indicate relationships that may be characterized as agent-act and cause-effect. These portrayals of *nkisi* as an object differ somewhat from Piedra's semiotic definition of it as a relationship between signifier and signified, yet their essential qualities are still defined in terms of relationships. A *nkisi*'s strength comes from each individual component and from their connectedness—an aspect which exemplifies its metonymic property (111).

The agent-act and cause-effect relationships typical of metonymy can be seen in other definitions of *nkisi* as well. The concept of *nkisi* represents human agency in a way that challenges the Western paradigmatic distinction between people and objects. This tradition has its own idea of causality which allows inanimate objects as well as humans to possess agency (Young 111). *Nkisi* varies both in the type of functions which it fulfills and in the way these functions are perceived. They may be used to help or hurt people, yet even the manner in which they help people may be perceived in different ways. Some people define *nkisi* as a charm or talisman used to help the sick (MacGaffey, *Fetishism* 173). Yet others portray them in a more active role. One type of *nkisi* consists of medicines which are combined in order to hunt down illnesses (Young 111). An important trait of such medicines is that they function via metaphoric or metonymic means, rather than by pharmacological properties (112). For example, white powder is a metaphor for the land of the dead, while red powder is a metaphor for the interstitial

space between this world and the next. A small stone, traditionally placed in a *nkisi* to remove a tumor, is likely used as a metaphor because of its similarity to the tumor in size and shape. A feather, in contrast, functions metonymically. By connoting flight, a feather is believed to help find a wrongdoer (Young 113). It is metonymic since it constitutes a part of an animal that represents an activity carried out by the whole animal, but for which that part is a uniquely necessary feature. While each ingredient of the *nkisi* has a certain metaphoric or metonymic property that addresses a need of the patient, they are combined as ingredients in a single *nkisi*.

A *nkisi*'s contents are said to include distinct metaphoric and metonymic categories of ingredients. The metaphoric elements—which may include shells, ginger, squash seeds, and a cricket among other objects—provide a concrete, tangible expression of the *nkisi*'s goal. The metonymic elements—white and red earths—do not reflect the desired goal, but rather establish a link between the powerful dead, the charm, and the client. Thus they provide the client with the illusion that he controls the effective forces, or as MacGaffey puts it, "spirits of the dead metonymically caught in a metaphorical trap" (MacGaffey, *Fetishism* 174). While earths provide a metonymic representation of the dead in order to strengthen the charm, other materials are used to metonymically represent the charm's intended recipient. These included fingernails, hair and other bodily exuviae of the person to be affected by the charm (176). Such items serve to metonymically represent the recipient, yet they do not seem to represent any desirable object or quality, as do the aforementioned metaphoric elements. Instead, they are more likely to function as links that enable the charm to carry out its task.

Interestingly, the metonymic ingredients, which are associated with the past and present, parallel the role of the signifier, which is the initial agent in a communicative act. In contrast, the metaphoric ingredients, which are associated with the future through their expression of a goal, parallel the function of the signified, which is the intended result of the agent's work. This observation matches with Piedra's linguistically-oriented definition of *nkisi* as the relationship between signifier and signified. But it also raises several other issues. First, a *nkisi*, and by extension a metonym, may essentially be the product of another metonym and a metaphor. None of the metaphoric elements from the *nkisi* listed above would make sense as the goal of a spell if interpreted metonymically as the signified, since none of the wholes of which they constitute parts would be a legitimate goal to which a human could aspire. However, they could legitimately be interpreted metaphorically as the signified, if one or more of their qualities corresponded figuratively with a worthy trait of a person. Regarding the metonymic elements, the colors of the earths may indeed have a metaphoric application for the signified if they are symbolically associated with a worthy human trait. However, when they are interpreted more fully—not only in terms of color, but also in terms of their content: earth—their association with the topic of death makes them an unlikely aspiration. When interpreted metonymically as the signifier, the red and white earths represent the dead and their power to intervene in the affairs of the living via the mediation of the Yoruba orisha. These earths, through their symbolic association with the past, may also represent the history of the Yoruba tradition, of which the current spell-casting agents are a continuation. Since red and white are two of the colors traditionally associated with Esu,

they may also represent the role that he plays in the interpretative process of Ifá utterances, thus reflecting his role as a signifier who helps to determine the signified.

These principles may also be applied to the interpretation of Christian symbols by African tribes. Some Kongolese, who are strongly influenced by the Yoruba, view Christ as the highest *nkisi* (Young 116). In doing so, they, like the Yoruba, syncretistically imprint their own cultural paradigm onto an image from another religion. In keeping with the dyadic metaphoric-metonymic connotation of *nkisi*, the Yoruba and Kongolese may interpret the Christian perception of the cross metonymically—as a connection to the source of Christian spiritual power by using one component of the crucifixion to represent the entire event. By itself, the cross has no separate component to function as a metaphor for the achievement of a future goal. However, the cross may double as a metaphor that represents the goal of spiritual union with Christ. This goal also brings to mind the essence of such a spiritual union, which, in semiotic terms, would correspond with synecdoche. Since synecdoche's analogous Yoruba trope, *nganga*, is defined as an expert who manipulates fetishes to restore the natural order, it would parallel, to a certain extent, the Christian interpretation of Christ's role and thus would facilitate the explanation of Christian theology to followers of the Kongolese religion.

The perception of *nkisi*—and by extension, of metonymy—as the product of a metaphor and metonym also raises the question of infinite reducibility. If each metonym may be broken down into a metaphor and another metonym—and each metaphor into its respective signifier and signified—then from an epistemological standpoint, it becomes impossible to ascertain the true meaning. The sense of indeterminacy implicit in this exercise not only reiterates a central component of the trickster orisha's identity, but also

foreshadows the indeterminacy inherent both in the meta-trope of *simbi*, and in *simbi*'s relationship with *nkisi*.

Their strength of ingredients combined in the *nkisi* comes not only from their individual properties but also from their being joined together (Young 111). In this sense, they are metonymic not by association to other parts of their former, naturally occurring, whole but to other parts of their new, synthetic whole—the *nkisi*. Also, the powers attributed to such ingredients correspond with extrinsic rather than intrinsic aspects and are non-qualitative in nature, in keeping with the function of metonymy (White, *Tropics* 36). In spite of the *nkisi*'s power, it has no form and thus needs an object to inhabit in order for its spirit to be harnessed. A special bag or wooden sculpture often serves this purpose (111). Interestingly, at least one scholar claims that *nkisi* serves as a hiding place for people's souls, thus implying that the *nkisi* bears the advantage in a co-dependent relationship (MacGaffey, *Fetishism* 173).

The aforementioned examples of master tropes associated with the figure of *nkisi* are all associated with physical or visual properties of an object, such as shape, color, or function. Yet *nkisi* may also incorporate verbal devices. In some cases, this includes the songs (MacGaffey, *Fetishism* 173). In other cases, it involves the use of puns (Young 112). Not only does the use of puns demonstrate the use of verbal metonymy for supernatural purposes; it also illustrates the potential multivalent power of a single object. For example, a small white rock, may function metaphorically through the symbolic value of the color white as well as through its similarity to a tumor in size and shape. It may also utilize a double entendre implicit in the Yoruba word for rock. In doing so, it functions metonymically by allowing one facet of a word's composite meaning to allude

to another facet, thus activating the power of the former. While the use of rhetorical devices associated with the words for ingredients in *nkisi* are less tangible than the ingredients themselves, they are thought to be no less powerful. In fact, they show that the range of a trope's function in Yoruba culture is not necessarily limited to the physical realm, but may extend to the verbal one as well. In doing so, such rhetorical devices bridge the gap between the physical and linguistic contexts. Here, one may see that *nkisi*'s intermediary function for language and literature parallels its traditional intermediary function between the material and spiritual worlds (Young 148). In a broader sense, this parallel also facilitates the perception of how the four Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes—*ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi*—which are more commonly utilized in non-verbal contexts, may be applied to the study of literary texts.

1.8 *Sigidi*

Nkisi and the magical powers attributed to its mimetic properties parallel the *sigidi*, an important type of image used by Babalawo to intervene in disputes (Wolff 215-16). *Sigidi* is not a meta-trope on par with *ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi*. Yet it still bears similarities with *nkisi* in both cosmological and semiotic contexts. *Sigidi* are three-dimensional human figures that are believed to influence conditions and events in the social world through supernatural mimesis (205, 215). While *sigidi* are not the only human figures which the Yoruba claim to endow with magical powers, they are reputed to be the best documented and the most fear-inspiring. They are used in the Yoruba medicinal system, yet they are considered to function as medicine in their own right rather than a mere ingredient. Their anthropomorphic form is said to harbor a spirit and

they are able to move in the real world, where they function as messengers and avengers for their owners. Their tasks include delivering threats, causing illness, beating or killing victims, destroying property, and stealing. Sometimes the sight of a *sigidi* alone is sufficient for it to achieve its goal (215). *Sigidi* are unique among medicinal figures in that they are capable of acting on their own volition and even of turning against their owners (216). *Sigidi* are also bear similarities with Esu. Like Esu, they may injure the enemies of their owners (218). They may also turn against owners, just as Esu may do to a person who invokes his name, makes him an offering, or requests his intervention (217). Conversely, Esu bears similarity to the *sigidi* as well, since Esu is the only Yoruba orisha represented in sculpture, while *sigidi* and other medicinal figures are routinely represented in this way (Wolff 218).

In terms of its function, *sigidi* may also parallel the autobiographical slave narrative. Both entities link reality and desire and, in doing so, serve to manipulate reality. They also utilize anthropomorphic form—sculpture in the case of *sigidi* and allegorical representation containing a *bildungsroman* in the case of the slave narrative. Further, both the *sigidi* and the narrative combine their anthropomorphic forms with other elements in order to increase their potency. While a narrative lacks its own volition, it may be said to contain a spirit, as Barnet suggests about his own narrative in response to an article by critic Michael Zeuske (Barnet, *Untouchable* 288).

Young makes the observation that slaves' bodies were metaphorically transformed into other goods such as sugar, tobacco, cotton, and indigo (Young 157). Thus, in a figurative sense as well as in a literal one, they were dehumanized. Implicit in the process of dehumanization is the loss of agency, free will and self determination.

While some slaves retained these attributes, the vast majority relinquished them, at least to a certain degree. While the continued practice of African religions was one way in which slaves sought to maintain agency, the use of *nkisi* was another. Not only did *nkisi* grant slaves an opportunity to exercise power indirectly over their masters through the preparation of hexes; it showed how seemingly inanimate entities could wield power both metaphorically and metonymically over animate ones, thus reversing the generally accepted hierarchy of power. In this respect they may have been valued by slaves both as a survival mechanism and as a symbol of the slaves' future potential.

1.9 Nganga

The concept of *nganga* is traditionally defined by the Yoruba as a doctor or expert who manipulates fetishes with the goal of restoring the natural order. It is portrayed as a human agent who, like the *ndoki*, acts upon the fetish. Yet these two agents differ in the manner in which they act upon the fetish. The *ndoki* materializes a relationship by creating fetishes, whereas the *nganga* manipulates fetishes that already exist (Piedra, *Monkey* 374). Thus, while the *nganga* possesses agency and power over another entity, its role appears secondary to that of the *ndoki*. The difference between *ndoki* and *nganga* is reminiscent of that between a text's original author and its editor. In this sense, it parallels the creative but distinct roles played by a slave writer or speaker, whose ideas and linguistic style are out of keeping with those held by the majority of readers, and by his collaborators, who adapt his message in terms of style and content to make it more palatable to their intended audiences.

Although Piedra makes no mention of *nganga* in the process of composition, its most likely semiotic role—based on its traditional Yoruba role as a manipulator who restores the natural order—would appear to be that of an editor. However, this may be problematic even from Piedra's perspective, since such a role seems to overlap with that of critic, a role that he has already assigned to *ndoki*. While an editor does not necessarily make explicit critical commentary on the text with which he works, he nevertheless performs a type of implicit criticism via his alterations to the text. He even surpasses the role of the usual critic in that his criticism is not merely voiced, but acted upon. In this sense, he merges the roles of critic and author (or artist) so that they are expressed simultaneously in a single line of writing and in what appears to be a single voice. In a slave autobiography that is narrated from a first person perspective, this type of revision may be said to constitute a union of the mimetic voice of the narrator and the diegetic voice of the commentator. In effect, it creates diataxis, which White defines as a combination of mimesis and diegesis (White, *Tropics* 4). The potential overlap of the roles of author and critic has already been realized by editors of slave narratives such as del Monte, Madden, and Barnet. In some cases, it is even realized by slave narrators themselves, to the extent of their involvement in the revisionary process. It may be due to this similarity that Piedra merges the roles of both artist and critic into the figure of *ndoki*. However, he raises the question of just how distinct the role of editor is from that of the author.

While the previous analysis of *nganga* is limited to its portrayal in the role of a human, it is also sometimes assigned non-human roles. One such example is the use of the word "*nganga*" to refer to the pot in which the ingredients of a *nkisi* are placed

(Montejo, *Biografía* 34). Such a role contrasts from that assigned by Piedra because it does not refer to a person and because it appears to be inanimate, given its fabricated origin. Lydia Cabrera defines a *nganga* as, among other things, a non-human entity—specifically an object constructed by a sorcerer, containing both plant and animal matter that is animated with the spirit of a dead person. She also indicates that it is alternately called *nganga*, *nkiso*, or *prenda* (Palmié 861). In Cabrera's terms, a *nganga* has components not only of an object and a dead person but also of living people who are members of the cult group. Further, the mixture in a *nganga* is used to produce new *ngangas* for junior members. Materials from the original *nganga* are rubbed into cuts in the shoulders, chest, and wrists of new members, in effect incorporating them into the new *nganga* which will then be shared with future initiates. While humans normally possess *ngangas*, they may also be possessed by them—a process which assimilates new spirits into the social fabric of humans (863). Over time, they extend into a bi-directional social network on both sides of the grave (863-64). By including components which metonymically represent different people, they condense extensive histories of social connections. *Ngangas* may be deconstructed after the death of their owner, if its spirit so assents. This parallels the emancipation of elderly slaves whose capacity for work was outweighed by the cost of their maintenance (864).

Cabrera also allows that *nganga* may have other meanings. One of these, echoing its use by Esteban Montejo, is a receptacle into which an initiate of the Yoruba religion deposits objects in order to accumulate power. However, Cabrera uses *nganga* to refer to everything in the space occupied by the receptacle, including both the container and its contents, thus subsuming *nkisi*. Such an overlap between *nganga* and *nkisi* parallels the

relation between synecdoche and metonymy. *Nganga* can also refer to a container's power. In these cases, it is used only to refer to inanimate or non-sentient entities. However, Cabrera also claims that *nganga* may refer to a spirit, supernatural force, or a deceased person (Bettelheim 37)—a definition which evokes the synecdochic quality of essence. All entities in the latter group are animate, sentient, and potentially in possession of agency.

The Yoruba figure of *nganga* corresponds with the trope of synecdoche. Further evidence for this exists in synecdoche's association with the organicist mode of explanation. Organicism is both integrative and reductive. It emphasizes the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm, thus constituting a synecdoche by token of its relationship between component parts which combine to form a qualitatively different whole (White, *Metahistory* 15). Two of its key features are intrinsicality and the embodiment of a qualitative relationship (36). A qualitative shift from part to whole is reminiscent of the manipulation of a fetish by the expert or *nganga* in such a way as to restore the natural order. In all three slave narratives, it is reflected in the addition and elision of various textual components, as well as adaptations made to the discursive style. Although all of these changes are effectively parts of the whole narrative, and represent qualities of the overall stereotypical experience of slavery as conceived by the editors, they were not necessarily part of the experience of each slave (34). Further, such adaptations were made in order to shape a message that would be largely in keeping with the expectations of a primarily white Cuban readership. Both the manipulation inherent in the concept of *nganga* and the stylistic revisions parallel the formalization of the organicist mode of explanation typical of synecdoche (White, *Tropics* 73).

1.10 Contrasts between *Nkisi* and Other Meta-Tropes

Given *nkisi*'s status in Afro-Caribbean thought as a fetish or hex, it may appear different from *ndoki* and *nganga*, since the latter two serve as agents of creation and revision. However, *nkisis* are reputed to be a class of semi-persons, who are alive, possess their own volition, and may also function as agents in people's lives (Young 113-114). An example of this is found in the Kongo-Angola derived religion of Cuba—Palo or Palo Monte—in which divinities are called *nkisis*. This anthropomorphization of *nkisi* is reinforced by the fact that one such divinity may be referred to as *Ndoqui* or *Centella Ndoqui*—both of which call to mind the first meta-trope, *ndoki* (Daniel 131). The ambiguity of *nkisi*'s status is facilitated by the belief in the power of sorcery, common among African and African-derived cultures, which frequently attributes misfortunes to hexes, rather than to people or deities. That human intervention was required to cast or cure a hex did not prevent the hex from possessing agency (Reis 61). In this respect, *nkisis* blur the distinction between things and people, and in doing so, call into question the criteria of agency (Young 114). In the second half of the twentieth century, the word "*nkisi*" could refer to the medicines of a *nkisi* priest (*nganga-nkisi*) or fetisher. However, in its customary meaning which is still used, *nkisi* signifies the *simbi* (or *bisimbi*) beings who inhabit waters, forests and land (MacGaffey, *Fetishism* 180). The overlap in meaning between *nkisi* and *nganga* in one context, and between *nkisi* and *simbi* in another may result from linguistic and conceptual syncretism in diasporic cultures with West-African roots. Yet, it may also reflect a deeper indeterminacy regarding the roles and limitations of each of the four meta-tropes. The definitions of *nkisi* include a human-made fetish or medicine that takes on a will of its own, a dead person who is able to

influence the living, and a divinity in the religion of Palo Monte in Cuba. Those of *nganga* range from an agent who works with a fetish to restore natural order to a pot used to prepare hexes. In both cases, concepts which are assigned specific roles as either an active entity—*nganga*—or a passive entity—*nkisi*—vacillate between activity and passivity—and by extension between agency and non-agency—in the Lucumi and Congo slave communities in Cuba. To echo Young’s observation, both *nkisi* and *nganga* may refer to animate entities such as humans, or to ostensibly inanimate entities such as hexes or their containers, which may still possess animate qualities. This conundrum raises the question of whether each concept is truly limited to its original active or passive function, or if it may expand to include new traits and abilities.

One piece of evidence which supports the latter alternative is *nkisi*'s association with the word *simbi*. As living beings, the *simbi* are inherently active, in possession of free will, and appear to function outside the parameters of any established civilization or tradition. In this sense, they contrast with the perception of *nkisi* as a passive link between an individual and a tradition, but are similar to *nkisi* in that both are non-human entities with their own volition. They also bring to mind the interpretation of *simbi* as a negative but active link between an individual and tradition, a challenger of signification, and as such, the opposite of *nkisi*. That two words whose theoretical connotations are diametrically opposed would be used as synonyms reiterates the idea of indeterminacy.

1.11 Simbi

The figure of *simbi* is perhaps the most enigmatic of the four Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes in its role as the challenger of signification and as a negative but active link between the individual and tradition. *Simbi*'s potential tangibility is reflected in its status as an omen that may be observed. However, its contrastive description as the spirit of the waters suggests an intangibility that contributes to its enigmatic reputation and reiterates the theme of indeterminacy. *Simbi* is similar to *nkisi* in that it is a link rather than the creator or manipulator of a link, such as *ndoki* or *nganga*. However, the type of link that it constitutes is a reversal of *nkisi*, in terms of its negativity and its activity. Piedra's reference to it as the challenger of signification in an esthetic context reiterates its already existing role in Yoruba culture as an entity which negates and undermines the relationship between signifier and signified constituted by *nkisi*, even while not necessarily appearing to do so (Piedra, *Monkey* 374-75). An important aspect of African-American literature in general that connects *simbi* to the trickster figure is the idea that while the signifiers may remain the same, the signifieds will change (371). Examples of this can be seen in the religious syncretism in Cuba and other parts of the Caribbean where the Yoruba trickster figure Legba is associated with various personages from the Catholic tradition. These include St. Peter, who parallels Legba in his role as a gatekeeper; St. Anthony of Padua, who is the patron saint of lost items and who, like Legba, is often portrayed as an old man carrying a wand to support himself; and the beggar Lazarus, who uses a crutch reminiscent of Legba's cane (Filan 75; Herskovits 637). Barnet acknowledges his awareness of such associations through his reference to

entities with which Legba is associated in Cuban Santería including el niño de Atocha, El Anima Sila, and San Martín de Porres (Barnet, *Cultos* 48).

In tropological terms, *simbi* appears to correspond with the trope of irony. Like irony, *simbi* is negational in function, as well as sentimental and self-conscious in ways that the other three tropes are not (White, *Metahistory* 37). Since this is negative but active, it corresponds with the attempt, on the part of either the author or the editor, to challenge traditional relationships. The dialectical nature attributed to irony may also be associated with *simbi*. This can be seen most clearly in *simbi*'s role as challenger of the relationship between the signifier and signified. In this way, it reflects not only a dialogue between these two entities, but also a dialogue between itself and the *nkisi*—the original relationship between signifier and signified, since it effectively constitutes *nkisi*'s reversal. To a certain extent, the relationship between *nkisi* and *simbi* parallels that between *ndoki* and *nganga*, since the second term in each pair constitutes a revision of the first term. *Nganga*, through its revisionary tendency, parallels synecdoche's reflection of an awareness of the reversibility of different systems (White, *Tropics* 73). This awareness inherent in synecdoche ultimately gives way to the greater awareness and freedom of irony. These traits can be seen in irony's detachment, reflection, and its critical function. It is worth noting that irony is critical of the operations of preceding tropes and of the structures that they incorporate (9). This trait enhances irony's meta-fictional quality. Hayden White describes irony as a type of metaphor that denies the assertion of similarity or difference indicated in the explicit sense of an expression (73). In this way, one may observe another similarity between irony and *simbi*, since irony's function here is implicit and—at least on the surface—intangible, in keeping with the

aura of *simbi*'s epithet "spirit of the waters." What irony and *simbi* share in this case is the ability to yield signifieds without being forced to reveal their signifiers.

1.12 Coco Macaco

Another concept closely related to both irony and *simbi* is the Yoruban figure Coco Macaco. Like *nganga* and *simbi*, a key aspect of Coco Macaco is its ambiguity. In both Africa and Cuba, it is traditionally associated with two opposing identities—dreaded ghost and playful monkey—which carry negative and positive connotations respectively regarding the manner in which they are thought to interact with humans (Piedra, *Monkey* 376). In this sense, Coco Macaco is reminiscent of Esu and his ability to work either for or against humans. The idea of a playful monkey further suggests a connection with Esu, since the latter is often depicted in both African and Cuban folklore as having a monkey at his side. In a literary context, Coco Macaco illustrates cultural doubts or fallacies within a system, thus paralleling the skeptical explanatory tactic or cynical moral posture associated with irony (Piedra, *Monkey* 375; White, *Tropics* 73-74). Ultimately, Coco Macaco is thought to play a role in a text's interpretation. Yet, as Piedra points out, the interpretative act may at times serve to neutralize with irony the attempt to fix a message from its original source (Piedra, *Monkey* 376). This view of interpretation parallels the culminating role of *simbi* in its reversal of *nkisi*—the relationship between signifier and signified—and its eclipsing of *nganga*—the attempt to revise the discourse in keeping with traditional order. African systems emphasize restoring the discourse to traditional order after adjusting it to challenging individuals and cultural variations, a trend which seems to prioritize *nganga* over *simbi*. Coco Macaco is an important symbol in both

African and Caribbean traditions because it reflects the mimicry of discourse and the mockery of tradition with defensive purpose. In African, non-colonial discourse, it tends to be directed only against fallacies in signification. In the post-colonial discourse of Cuba, however, its application is broader. Here it addresses the enslaving sociolinguistic conditions by figuratively referring to the middle ground where "primitive" African discourse and "civilized" Western discourse meet (Piedra, *Monkey* 375).

Incidentally, an example of the monkey's symbolic role as a point of cultural intersection may be found in a story by Barnet, "La lechuza y el mono" (The Owl and the Monkey). According to the story, at the time of slavery, each co-protagonist possessed a unique gift which could benefit to the other. The owl possessed both diurnal and nocturnal vision while the monkey possessed the gift of fluent speech. However, its words were not those commonly understood by Spanish speakers, as one can see from the following transliteration of its song:

Diambo, malembe, diambo

Cuenda endoque cuenda

cuenda endoque diambo. (Piedra, *Monkey* 377)

The owl and monkey became friends. Yet in their collaboration with Day to appropriate the Moon's ability to reflect light, they were circumvented by a pigeon who overheard the monkey's plans. As a result, the Moon hid its desired attributes and the Day punished the collaborators by depriving the owl of its day vision and the monkey of its voice (377). While two English translations of the song already exist, Piedra provides another one to account for the previous translations' ambiguity in a manner that does not appear to detract from their message:

Discourse, the ominous, discourse.

Continue, counter-signifying, continue

continue, the counter-signifying, discourse. (Piedra, *Monkey* 378)

Of the four Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes, the only one referred to in this song is *ndoki*, via the variant spelling *endoque*. While the earlier translations identify it as either a witch or a fetish-maker, both of which are in keeping with its traditional definition, Piedra's translation of it here as "counter-signifying" assigns it a meaning more commonly associated with the figure of *simbi*.

One of Barnet's goals in including a non-translated KiKongo poem in the text could be to indicate that any sign is inherently arbitrary and that its meaning is determined by the interpreter's perspective—an observation reflected in its three different, and somewhat contradictory, translations. Reflecting the dominance of the interpreter over both the message—*nkisi*—and its co-creators—*ndoki* and *nganga*—is essentially what *simbi* does. It may be partly for this reason that Piedra identifies Barnet's use of the monkey as a parody of the concept of linguistic permanence (Piedra, *Monkey* 376). He acknowledges that African practices were transferred to and maintained in the New World, specifically in Cuban literature in which the BaKongo-Cuban concepts such as *en-doqui*, *fianga*, *(e)nkiso* and *Coco* or *Coco-Macaco* thrive (375). Piedra's identification of these four concepts in the Cuban literary context lend credence to their continued importance in African diasporic culture. His spelling and word choice reflect the very impermanence which he observes. Three of these concepts have variant spellings, and the fourth concept is expressed with a new word. Instead of listing *simbi* as the fourth concept, as he has done earlier in his article (Piedra, *Monkey*

374), he instead lists Coco Macaco. This should not be seen as an attempt on his part to revise the structure of Yoruba thought, but merely to term it in a way that expresses the significant overlap between the concepts of *simbi* and Coco Macaco—two figures that are revisionary, ambiguous, and trickster-like. It is important to remember that, beyond changes in the visual appearance of words, linguistic impermanence may also be found in their interpretation. This phenomenon, which is related to the functions of *simbi* and Coco Macaco, has important parallels in the function of Esu.

1.13 The (Metaphoric) Identity and (Metonymic) Behavior of Odus

In the Ifá divination system of the Yoruba religion, human access to divine wisdom is dependent on entities called Odus. While Odus do fulfill a role comparable to scripture in other religions, they are not viewed merely as collections of verses, but as animate entities, or more specifically, as kings, each with its own unique traits. They are also thought to visit each other's kingdoms. As a monarch, each Odu visits the Odu below him in rank. During the sixteen-day journey, he divines via a recitation of verses from the Ifá compendium. Later, the host Odu—the lower-ranking Odu—will undertake a return visit and recitation. After the first pair of visits between the first two Odus, the first Odu will visit and recite to—and in return, be visited and recited to by—the third Odu. This process will continue until the highest ranking Odu has made contact with the other fifteen for a total of thirty visits and thirty recitals from the Ifá compendium. Then the second Odu will begin the same process of visitation and recitation with the fourteen Odu below him for a total of twenty-eight visits and recitals. With each new Odu, the number of visits and recitals initiated will decrease by one, and the total number of

reciprocal visits and recitals will decrease by two, until the sixteenth and final Odu, who will not initiate any visits or recitals (Morton-Williams, Bascom, and McClelland 425).

The pattern of visits exhibits certain parallels with the cycle of master tropes. The visits initiated by the first Odu, which number fifteen and constitute half of the visits in which he participates, correspond with metaphor, since he is as an active signifier whose action yields a signified in the form of a recital, and a response in the form of a return visit and recital from another Odu. Both the interpretation of the first signified and the rendition of a reciprocal signifier cause the composite signified to deviate from the initial Odu's expectation. For the second through fifteenth Odus, the number of visits initiated, the number of visits participated in during initiatory stages, and the combined number of recitations delivered and heard during these stages decrease steadily from fourteen to one, twenty-eight to two, and twenty-eight to two respectively. Yet each Odu from the second to the fifteenth functions as both an initiator and a respondent. Since their actions may be seen as parts that represent the whole, they correspond with metonymy and synecdoche. The sixteenth Odu does not initiate any visits or recitations. While he visits and recites fifteen times and is visited and recited to fifteen times like all other Odus, he only acts after the process has been initiated by a higher-ranking Odu. Since his role is a reversal of the metaphoric role of the first Odu, he corresponds with irony.

An Odu may not make a forward journey with a name that precedes his own on the list. He may only go in reverse order and in response to an initial visit that has been initiated by the preceding Odu. In the original form of the system, reverse journeys could only yield negative responses. A negative response is not necessarily unfavorable and may even be desired, depending on how a request is expressed by a client. Sometimes

clients even use tricks to ensure the objectivity of the answers which they receive. Two such tricks are reversing the standard questioning procedure and using a 'messenger' against its own established symbolism (Morton-Williams, Bascom, and McClelland 426).

Each recital bears a bipartite name composed of the names of the reciting and listening (visiting and host) Odu respectively. The recital of the initiator is listed first and the recital of the respondent is listed second. In the latter case, the names are reversed, since the Odu who was previously a listening host is now a reciting visitor. Since all Odu except the first function as respondents to the visits initiated by other Odu in previous stages, they—like the first Odu—each participate in thirty visits and thirty recitations. In terms of visiting, hosting, listening, and reciting, they are all equals. Yet in terms of initiating and responding, they are not equal; the first Odu initiates the greatest number of meetings, whereas the sixteenth Odu initiates none at all. The actions of the sixteenth Odu correspond with the trope of irony. Perhaps the most obvious reason for this is that, even though the number of recitals that begin with his own name equals the number of recitals that begin with names of each of the other Odu, he does not initiate any of the visits. He only returns visits after being visited by someone else.

A parallel also exists with the palm nuts or opele chain used in the divining process. A throw in which all eight nuts are convex would correspond with metaphor, whereas a throw in which all eight are concave parallels irony. There are several reasons for this. First, as the only two throws with uniform results, they constitute what are ostensibly the least complex of signifiers. Since metaphor is often viewed as the most rudimentary of the master tropes, and the one whose modes of emplotment and explanation suggest the simplest of outlooks, it is logical that it would be associated with

a uniform throw. Further, the convexity of all of the nuts or marks on the chain may represent a signifier through its presence rather than through its absence. Irony, which is sometimes defined as the opposite of metaphor—and suggests as much in its cyclical location and its conceptual complexity, would be the logical trope for a throw in which all eight nuts are concave. While irony is really the least rudimentary of the master tropes, one of its inherent tendencies is to appear to be what it is not.

Those throws in which the signs lack uniformity—some signs are convex while others are concave—would most logically be associated with metonymy and synecdoche. Parallels to this may be seen in these two tropes' corresponding modes of emplotment—tragedy and comedy respectively. More specifically, such parallels are evident in the tragedy's and comedy's treatment of the theme of conflict. Both of these modes of emplotment constitute qualified versions of the romantic perception of the world. The romantic view, which is associated with metaphor, is largely optimistic regarding the issue of human redemption. While tragedy and comedy both allow for different degrees of redemption, they are both less optimistic than romance. Likewise, they both underscore the centrality of conflict (White, *Metahistory* 10).

The correspondence between the behavior of the Odu and the functions of Western master tropes may also have a parallel with the four Yoruba meta-tropes *ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi*. *Simbi*'s (and irony's) inherent negativity corresponds with the inherent negativity of any Odu recital that is responsive rather than initiatory. While responsive recitals are carried out by all of the primary Odu except for the first one, they achieve their maximum degree in the sixteenth Odu, where they constitute the entirety of the verses recited. The steadily increasing presence of negativity from the second

through the sixteenth Odus corresponds with a similar trend from *nkisi* to *nganga* to *simbi*. Of these three tropes, *simbi* possesses the greatest degree of negativity. *Nganga's* negativity is due to the responsive status inherent in its function of revising or manipulating a fetish to restore the natural order. *Nkisi's* negativity is less apparent than *simbi's*, since *nkisi* is identified as a positive link between the individual and a tradition, while *simbi* is identified as a negative one. Although *simbi* is active in its negative orientation, *nkisi* is passive in its positive orientation. Thus, *nkisi's* passivity may signify a more subtle form of negativity.

1.14 The Hierarchy of Metaphor and Metonymy and Its Link to Ifá Divination

In spite of the commonly held belief in the primacy of metaphor over all other rhetorical tropes, some scholars deem it subordinate to metonymy. Paul de Man and Umberto Eco think that each metaphor has its origin in an underlying chain of metonyms that form the framework of a semantic field. Jonathan Culler distinguishes between views regarding the primacy of either trope. He claims that prioritizing metaphor treats language as a means of expressing thoughts, perceptions, and truth. Prioritizing metonymy treats that which language expresses as the result of discursive relations and processes (Hoey 35).

The dilemma regarding the primacy of either metaphor or metonymy parallels, to a certain extent, that of the two Yoruba orishas Ifá and Eshu. It also has applications in the relationships between the messages associated with these two figures, as well as the interpretation of Ifá's message by the Babalawo, and the broader relationship between spoken words and their written rendition. Like metaphor, the transfer of the Ifá

compendium from Ifá to Eshu—or from Ifá to the Babalawo—and then to non-initiated humans involves the substitution of one text for another. Further, in spite of certain inevitable differences in form and content, the second text—or signified—is considered to be essentially synonymous to the first text—or signifier—in each case. In some cases, like that of Eshu, the change in the text is due to interpretation by a medium. In other cases, like that of the Babalawo, it is due to the selection of a text based on chance throws of a divination instrument, followed by the Babalawo's selection of verses from the resulting text—verses which, while relevant to a client's situation, address it in principal rather than through explicit instruction.

While the selected verses may relate metaphorically in their application to the dilemma of the Babalawo's client, they also have a metonymic component. The Babalawo is guided by external signs only so far as the name of the Odu. The Odu to which he is guided by throws of palm nuts or the opele chain is a whole from which he must select the most appropriate part in the form of verses. Thus, a sign rendered by the divining object represents a whole that, in turn, representatively guides him to a specific part. Other components of these interpretative processes parallel metonymy as well. In contrast to metaphor, which deals with relationships of substitution, metonymy deals with relationships of contiguity. The latter are apparent in the hierarchy of the sixteen primary Odus, the organization of the 240 secondary Odus whose names are derivatives of the principal sixteen, and in the organization of verses in each Odu (Buckley 193).

Metonymy may also be seen in the folkloric perception of Odus as animate entities. They form a unique category, neither eborá (spirit) nor orisha (deity), and are considered to be intelligent beings who play an active role in the process of divination

(Buckley 193). In this sense, they parallel hexes (*nkisi*) as animate beings. They are also similar to *nkisi* in their metonymic aspect. The process of mixing ingredients in a *nkisi* may yield physical and chemical changes in the primary substances and, thus, give rise to a product that is more powerful than its parts. Likewise, the interconnectedness of verses in an Odu changes the figurative meanings of individual verses and enhances the composite power of the collection. In a folkloric context, the cause of Odus' intelligence may not be known. Yet in an esthetic context, their metonymic intertextual enhancement may be viewed as a source of animation. At least among the sixteen principal Odus, their mutual interactions—including pairs of initiatory and responsive visits and recitations—constitute a veritable matrix of signifiers and signifieds. Further, the sequence of visits, the role of each visit as initiatory or responsive, the varying degree of freedom with which each Odu may make forward journeys, the obligation for all Odus—other than the first one on the list—to proceed in reverse order and in a responsive capacity when dealing with higher-ranked Odus, and the idea accepted by some scholars that reverse journeys constitute negative replies all illustrate metonymic features (Morton-Williams, Bascom, and McClelland 426). Further, in each of these instances, the meaning of an Odu's name—and the verses that it represents—is, at least in part, determined metonymically by relationships with other Odus.

The autobiographical accounts of all three slave narrators parallel the actions of responsive, non-initiatory Odus in that they are made at the request of higher ranking people. To an extent, the meanings of their narratives are influenced by the requests to which they respond and to the motives behind those requests. In this respect, the narratives—even if they function as metaphors for experiences of specific demographic

groups—are metonymic in that their meanings are partially determined via their contiguous relationships with other languages and people. Like recitals by the last of the sixteen principal Odus, each slave narrative bears a reference to its narrator, either by name or by use of the term "Autobiography." However, the narration is made only in response to a semiotic action by a higher-ranking entity.

1.15 Catachresis: Its Relevance to Metaphor, Metonymy, and Ifá Divination

For the reasons mentioned in the preceding section, it is logical to conclude that wisdom from the Ifá compendium depends on metonymy for its discovery, dispersion, and interpretation. However, since Yoruba practitioners consider such wisdom—even in its processed form—to be a derivative of divine truth, one must also acknowledge its metaphoric aspect. In effect, the issue of which—if either—trope takes precedence is not resolved. A concept that may aid in understanding this dilemma is catachresis—a complex trope with both metaphoric and metonymic components. Catachresis uses a word—usually a name for a body part—to refer to a part of another, inanimate whole. It is useful for expressing concepts that are not otherwise available in the language. By appropriating a word from one context and applying it—somewhat figuratively—in another one, catachresis appears metaphoric. Unlike metaphor, however, it does not involve substitution of a figurative term for a literal one, since there is no literal or pre-existing term to be replaced (Hoey 35). Nor, like metonymy, does it use a part to represent a whole or vice versa. However, it does reflect a metonymic parallel by expressing the part-whole relationship of an inanimate object and its component in terms of the part-whole relationship of an animate body and one of its organs.

Aristotle describes catachresis as a type of verbal transference, or "the application of metaphor to something that can only be metaphorically named" (Nishimura 905). He claims that analogy is central to catachresis, which can be seen in the implicit comparison of two sets of part-whole relationships. He also acknowledges a role played by personification within the broader function of catachresis, specifically the personification of spiritual and natural elements, which facilitates their metaphoric transference. This phenomenon may be seen in the Yoruba words *nkisi* and *simbi*, both of which may refer to entities in physical, spiritual or semiotic contexts. It is also evident in the *Odus*, which refer alternately to groups of verses or animate beings. Personification is often overlooked, especially if it has simultaneous figurative and non-figurative functions (906-07). Examples of this in Yoruba culture include *nkisi*, *simbi*, Ifá and the *Odus*. The functions of personification and animation also relate to the trope of prosopopoeia, in which an absent, dead, or imaginary person is represented as speaking. Prosopopoeia is not directly evident in a *nkisi*, though the remains of dead people that are used in a *nkisi* may be viewed as a form of prosopopoeia. Prosopopoeia is clearly present in the recitation of Ifá verses by *Odus* or *Babalawos*. It is also present in the publication of slave narratives by anyone other than their original narrators.

Several noteworthy examples of catachresis exist in the Yoruba religion and its New-World outgrowths. In the former, Ifá is identified as both the messenger who communicates wisdom to either the *Babalawo* or *Eshu*, and as the message itself (Clark 236; Peel 122). Since Ifá is treated as synonymous with Yoruba sacred texts, his name serves as a metaphor for the entirety of wisdom contained therein. As the message that is transferred, he corresponds more closely with metonymy, since only a portion of his

wisdom is communicated at any one time, or, for that matter, known by any individual Babalawo (Clark 246). Metonymy also plays a role in his status as a messenger, since such status is contingent upon a contiguous relationship between himself and the recipient of his knowledge.

In fact, the two expressions "Ifá oracle," meaning a Babalawo, and "Ifá text," meaning a Babalawo's utterance, are both metonyms. The first expression refers to a contiguous relationship that, while not identifying the Babalawo as a part of Ifá, does imply the former's knowledge as a part of the latter's infinite wisdom. The second expression addresses this part-whole relationship more directly by referring to a body of knowledge—albeit a partial one—rather than a conduit for such knowledge as denoted by the term "oracle." Each expression uses a metonymy (directly for "Ifá text" and indirectly for "Ifá oracle") to represent the metaphor of Ifá's knowledge.

In messages from Ifá that are interpreted by Babalawos for other humans, the received Ifá text is a metaphor (an interpretation) of a metonym (a selection of specific verses) of a second metonym (a partial knowledge of each of the Odus of the Ifá compendium) of a second metaphor (Ifá) for divine wisdom. In messages from Ifá that are interpreted by Eshu—a fellow orisha—prior to being accessed by humans, the received Ifá text is a metaphor (an interpretation) of a second metaphor (Ifá) for divine wisdom. These two paths to wisdom differ from one another in the number of stages of rhetorical displacement between the initial signifier and the ultimate signified, and in the perceived divinity or humanity of the interpreter. Eshu, like Ifá, is considered divine, whereas the Babalawos are not. This is the principal reason for the lack of metonymic displacement in his dispersal of wisdom. By token of his divinity, Eshu has full access to

divine wisdom, so he does not use partial knowledge to represent full knowledge. Further, he does not allude to specific verses of an Odu in the manner of the Babalawo priests. Yet the Babalawos, in spite of their human status, are generally considered to be trustworthy, while Eshu is universally acknowledged as a trickster. Thus, the path with the greater number of stages may be said to have a more reliable—if less capable—interpreter. This phenomenon is reminiscent of Andrea Frisch's view regarding the subjectivity of eyewitness testimony. Frisch suggests that, in spite of an eyewitness' greater access to an event, her testimony is marred by a personal connection that a more distant commentator would lack (Frisch 32). She also indicates that the citation of a pre-existing account, in contrast with direct experience, grants testimony an atemporal quality that transcends the moment of the event and rises to the level of generality (178-79). To extrapolate Frisch's idea to the context of Yoruba religion, Eshu's greater access to both divine and worldly knowledge diminishes his ability to view and comment on it objectively. His direct access to wisdom eliminates the need for any citation by him and, thus, diminishes the atemporal quality of his discourse. Conversely, the Babalawo's objectivity is not only thought to be enhanced by his ostensibly selfless motives; it is effectively augmented by his distance—both from the dilemma being resolved and from the text that serves as the basis for its resolution. His role as both a recipient of the client's request and as a dispenser of advice is distinguished by a level of generality and atemporality. This raises the question of how the reliability of a chain of signifiers is influenced by its length, its interpreter, its number of stages, and the category of trope used in each stage.

In the context of Ifá divination, it appears that reliability is enhanced by greater distance and by the addition of metonyms to the existing chain of metaphors. Similar examples may be seen in Barnet's commentary on the account of Esteban Montejó, and in Michael Zeuske's commentary on Barnet's treatment of Montejó's account. Barnet's commentary in his *Afterward to Montejó's account* is largely limited to the third-person perspective; thus, it prioritizes a contiguous, metonymic relationship between the two men rather than a substitutive, metaphoric one. However, in his article, "The Untouchable Cimarrón," written in response to Zeuske's "The *Cimarrón* in the Archives: A Re-reading of Miguel Barnet's Biography of Esteban Montejó," Barnet at least partially replaces this metonymic relationship with a metaphoric one. He continues to express a degree of contiguity with Montejó by referring to himself as the rightful custodian of both primary sources concerning Montejó and the form of his representation in secondary media. Yet, he ultimately refers to himself as Montejó's latter-day embodiment. While Barnet's article does allude to Montejó's oral account, and thus, is not entirely devoid of citation, it prioritizes Barnet's own written adaptation. It also transitions from a third-person perspective to a first-person perspective as Barnet shifts the focus from Montejó to himself, and in doing so shifts the predominant trope from metonymy to metaphor. Perhaps unknowingly, Barnet simultaneously takes upon himself the roles of both messenger and message, in a manner reminiscent of Ifá. Yet, in contrast to Ifá, Barnet presents himself as a revised form of the message rather than its original. His transition from a metonymic approach to a more metaphoric one suggests corresponding shifts from objectivity to subjectivity, and from prose to poetry.

1.16 Overlap between Messenger and Message

The overlap between messenger and message is not unique to Ifá. It is found in the logocentric approach of Christianity in which God is portrayed as being both "with the word" in the sense of a messenger, and "the word" in the sense of a message. This overlap is reiterated in the portrayal of Jesus as one who not only brings a message of salvation, but who functions as the ultimate form of the message—as the culmination of a series of prophecies, each of which foreshadowed his own prophecy—and, most importantly, as the means of the message's realization in both a physical and a spiritual sense. In a manner similar to that of the Yoruba religion, the personification of the Christian message in the figure of Jesus enhances its transferability between physical and spiritual realms, as well as between figurative and non-figurative functions.

Such an overlap also parallels the ambiguity—and to a certain degree, interchangeability—of the terms *nkisi* and *nganga* in the discussion of Yoruba fetishes or hexes, those who create or adapt these mixtures, and the containers into which they are placed. *Nganga* may refer to a priest, the fetish or hex, or the container that holds it, thus subsuming the roles of messenger, message, and conduit. *Nkisi* may refer to the dead, the fetish or hex that contains remnants of the dead, the medicines used by a Yoruba priest, and the Yoruba priest himself. Thus *nkisi* subsumes part of the origin of the message that existed prior to itself, a residual of this origin manifest in the message, the message itself, and the messenger. Since a *nkisi* is believed to be animate and possess its own volition—thus transcending, at least in a figurative sense, the division between the non-living and the living—it may also be said to transcend the distinction between message and messenger. Since some remains of the dead who existed prior to the message's

compilation are integrated into the message-cum-messenger of *nkisi*, one may say that they posthumously unite with an agent of their own perpetuation. The overlap of message and messenger is also evident in traditions where the term *nganga* is used in place of *nkisi*. Here, senior *nganga* priests mix the *nganga* fetish with their own blood as well as with the blood of junior initiates, in effect yielding a physical embodiment of the message in themselves and of themselves in the message. Thus one may conclude that message and messenger are mutually influential and, at least on a figurative level, incorporate certain elements of each other in their various manifestations.

1.17 Doubling

Doubling is an essential component of the Yoruba consciousness. Doubleness may be associated with richness, and fullness of life. Further, it is considered to be a facet of oneness. Humans possess both oneness as bodies, and twoness, with mortal and immortal components. Doubling realizes power through repetition, but also enjoys a connective quality (Armstrong 32). The principle of doubling is found in a variety of ways in the Western semiotic system, particularly in the four master tropes. It may also be found in the Yoruba meta-tropes, the Ifá divination system, and the functions of Eshu and other trickster figures.

Several examples of doubling are evident in the internal structures and external relations of Odu signs. An Odu sign consists of eight elements in short single lines and placed in two columns of four items each. There are sixteen possible combinations in which the marks on the right and left columns are identical. These are the principal Odus. The remaining 240 Odus have differences in their columns and are called children

of Odu or Omo Odu. The name of each principal Odu consists of the name of the right column followed by the left one. If the names of the two columns are identical, then the name is listed once and followed by a word, *meji*, indicating its doubleness (Morton-Williams, Bascom, and McClelland 406). Here, one may see an example of doubling via the repetition of names, and a symbolic attempt to convert doubleness to singleness through its representation as a single word. The word *meji* has a somewhat ironic role, since it communicates the concept of doubleness without a tangible doubling of a word on the page via repetition. However, in order for *meji* to clarify the object of its doubling power, it needs another word—the name being doubled—to serve as its referent. Thus, it still requires the same number of words to express doubling as does a repetition. In fact, by listing two different words rather than the same word twice, its visual effect contradicts the idea of doubleness that it serves to communicate and, in doing so, reflects its ironic aspect. This phenomenon reflects the observation that irony may be expressed through verbal structure, but lacks formal specified determinants. It always involves some type of doubling (Partner 107).

The ambiguous and potentially deceptive nature of bipartite names among the Odus is increased by the use of alternate names. The name of the highest ranking Odu is expressed by doubling the sign "Ogbe," and may be written "Ogbe-Ogbe," using a repetition of the referent. It may also be written "Ogbe Meji" or "Eji Ogbe," both of which use another word to indicate a doubling of the referent (Morton-Williams, Bascom, and McClelland 411). One interesting aspect of this is that the doubling component, or multiplier, may be placed either before or after its referent. Since its placement does not affect the name's interpretation by Ifá practitioners, all three forms of the name provide

an example of different signifiers yielding the same signified. This is a reversal of the phenomenon in which a single signifier yields multiple signifieds—an occurrence which may privilege the message's recipient over the emitter in the determination of its ultimate meaning. By token of this contrast—and the fact that Odu names are unlikely to have any meaning in other languages, especially when expressed in bipartite form, the existence of multiple signifiers that yield the same signified would privilege the emitter over the recipient.

While the variant forms of double names for the sixteen principle Odus are accepted as synonymous by their users, they inadvertently raise a deeper dilemma: the primacy of either metaphor or metonymy. The double name "Ogbe-Ogbe" visualizes both a metaphor—"Ogbe"—for a sign used in divination, and a metonym through the contiguous relationship inherent in the doubling of the sign for the purpose of identifying a specific Odu. By repeating the name, it also corresponds with the mathematical function of addition. The two alternate names, "Ogbe Meji" and "Eji Ogbe," which are bipartite but not double, correspond with the mathematical function of multiplication. Like the double name, they reflect both metaphoric and metonymic aspects by using names to represent divination signs and by displaying their contiguous relationship between the two signs. However, each alternate name prioritizes a different trope. "Ogbe Meji," which places the divination sign before the multiplier, and thus alludes to a general category of wisdom before naming the type of contiguity that narrows the search, prioritizes metaphor. Conversely, "Eji Ogbe," which places the multiplier first, and, in doing so, names the type of contiguity for narrowing the search before identifying the more general category of knowledge in which the search will occur, prioritizes

metonymy. If this name is interpreted in a strictly linear fashion, the word *aji* has no practical value prior to the naming of its referent, since it cannot double anything until the entity to be doubled is known. Until the second part of the name, "Ogbe," is factored in, the meaning of the expression is indeterminate. Although the expression's meaning is ultimately clarified, its propensity toward indeterminacy underscores the intrinsic connection between metonymy and irony. It also reiterates the broader freedom of signification that irony enjoys over the other three master tropes.

The use of alternate names is not limited to the sixteen principal Odus; it is also found among the 240 secondary Odus. For example, "Ogbe Iwori," which includes the names of the first and third Odus respectively, may also be expressed as "Ogbe-w(o)-ehin," meaning "Ogbe look back" (Morton-Williams, Bascom, and McClelland 411). In this case, as in those that involve the doubling of a name, the second referent of the original bipartite name is replaced by another entity that specifies the type of contiguity inherent in the original. For secondary Odus, whose original names consist of two different signs, a name that was originally expressed as a relationship between the signs of two different principal Odus is altered to reflect only the sign of the higher-ranking Odu. The prioritization of the higher Odu in a pair reflects the belief that only a higher-ranking Odu may initiate contact with another Odu. Ironically, the translation of the example provided, "Ogbe look back," suggests a responsive gesture on the part of the highest-ranking Odu—an occurrence that is prohibited by Odu protocol.

In a manner reminiscent of the Odus' alternate names, the names of the divination signs and their qualifiers have alternate pronunciations (Morton-Williams, Bascom, and McClelland 411-18). This phenomenon involves a less conscious process, since its

development is spread over a broad temporal and geographical span. Yet it still reflects multiple signifiers yielding the same signified and, in doing so, favors the emitter over the recipient. The wide variety of signs that may be used to invoke the Odus, and the potential confusion that they may create, are exemplified by the variant pronunciations and spellings of *meji*, the Yoruba signifier of doubleness that follows its referent. These include "magi," "megi," "jime," "medji" among populations in Africa. Variants in Cuba include "meji," "meje," "melli," "melle" (411). There are also different forms of the name *aji*, the Yoruba signifier of doubleness that precedes the referent. These include "Edju" and "Edschu," "oji," and "ji" in Africa and "elli" in Cuba (411). These names are interesting for several reasons. First, they raise the possibility of linguistic syncretism, in which the substitution of different sounds, coupled with figurative connotations, might allow for a name to develop into another word with a different denotation. If so, then a word denoting doubleness could gradually evolve into a similar-sounding new word denoting not merely doubleness, but one of its aspects. If a connection were established for the post-referent qualifiers with "Jiwe," "Jigüe" and "Güije," or for the pre-referent qualifiers with "Eshu" and "Esu," each of which refers to either the Yoruba trickster figure or one of its Caribbean outgrowths, then it would underscore the inherently ironic facet of doubleness. Second, these names gradually shift power from the emitter to the recipient regarding the determination of an utterance's meaning. They also cause people who were once recipients to become emitters, and words that were once mere signifieds to become new signifiers. Thus, inherent changes in pronunciation, meaning, and semiotic roles for both messengers and their messages reflect the cycle of master tropes.

1.18 Tropological Interpretation of Ifá Signs

The fact that two opposing signs may be used to express the names of the orishas—and by extension, the sixteen major Odu, their 240 derivative Odu, and the entire Ifá compendium—illustrates the tropological or rhetorical nature of all forms of communication. Regardless of its intended or interpreted meaning, each mark—whether it is a black or white circle on paper, a single slash or two parallel slashes on wood, or a concave or convex surface on a palm nut or an opele chain—functions metaphorically by token of its representation of something other than itself. At the same time, it functions metonymically as part of a binary entity that implies a whole. The applications of metaphor and metonymy also apply to all 256 combinations of signs, regardless of their medium of expression. One may also say that each combination of signs constitutes both synecdoche and irony, a conclusion that appears even more logical, given that these are often defined as extensions of metaphor and metonymy respectively.

If this evaluation is based on the shape of the marks on the chain or palm nuts, then the convex or external half of the nut could be associated with metonymy and irony, due to the external nature of their discursive meanings. By the same token, the concave or internal half of the divining tool could be associated with metaphor and synecdoche, due to the internal nature of their discursive meanings (Clark 254). Yet, this interpretation is symbolic and largely superficial, since it considers only the initial sign—the signifier—that guides the Babalawo in his selection of texts. It does not consider any aspect of the content that he selects: the signified of the first, random, divinatory step—the Odu whose name has been invoked; the signifier of the second, voluntary, divinatory step—the Babalawo's selection of texts from within the Odu; or the signified which is

derived from these texts via the Babalawo's interpretation. While the chance-based first step in the Ifá divination system does not prove the selection of signifiers to be inherently random in all language systems, it is reminiscent of the trial-and-error approach used at virtually all levels of language production and interpretation. It also parallels the fact that, in a comparison of two dissimilar entities—the essential function of metaphor, the signifier is necessarily random—and may even vary among people who intend the same signified. This rule applies to the four master tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony—and, by extension, to all rhetorical tropes, which may be interpreted as variants or derivatives of the principal four, the principal two—metaphor and metonymy, or even, some may argue, the principal one—metaphor.

If each combination simultaneously constitutes all four master tropes, then it is difficult—if not impossible—to assign a master trope to the resulting story or greeting chosen from the Ifá compendium on the basis of a random combination rendered by a throw. A more logical approach for determining the predominant trope in each case would be to identify the predominant mode of emplotment of the story that is chosen—romance, tragedy, comedy, or satire—or the predominant mode of explanation—ideographic, organicist, mechanistic, contextualist—and then match it with its corresponding trope (White, *Tropics* 70). While romantic mode of emplotment supports a hero's victory and transcendence of worldly problems, irony does the opposite, by suggesting that the world dominates humans rather than vice versa. Comedy and tragedy, which correspond with synecdoche and metonymy respectively, allow for at least partial liberation from a fallen state. Comedy is the more optimistic of these two. It allows for the potential victory of humankind over the world. Tragedy, on the other hand, while

allowing for the victory of other humans, is standard in its narration of the protagonist's fall. Reconciliations at the end of comedy reflect generally improved conditions for humans as a result of their struggle. In tragedy, the reconciliations at the end represent humans' acceptance of limitations that they cannot overcome (White, *Metahistory* 8-9). Thus a text that is optimistic for the protagonist and for humanity as a whole would be romantic and correspond with metaphor. Texts of increasing degrees of pessimism would correspond with synecdoche, metonymy, and irony respectively.

1.19 Interpretation of Odu in Terms of Semiotic Power and Abstraction

The first Odu of the principal sixteen is directly invoked sixteen times—once for each pair of visits and recitations in which he participates. Conversely, the sixteenth Odu on this list is never invoked directly at all. The number of throws used to directly invoke each Odu steadily decreases from the beginning to the end of this list, as does the number of initiatory visits and recitations carried out by each Odu. Yet the number of pairs of visits and recitations for each Odu remains the same: sixteen (Morton-Williams, Bascom, and McClelland 408). If one divides the number of visits and recitations in which each Odu participates by the number of times he is invoked, then one may conclude that the lower the rank of the Odu (and the less frequent his invocation), the greater his semiotic and visitational power, relative to the frequency of his invocation. According to this line of reasoning, the last Odu would, at least in a symbolic sense, possess unlimited semiotic and visitational power relative to the frequency of his invocation, since the ratio between his visits/recitations and invocations would be indefinable and infinite. This might lead one to assume that an Odu's rank on the list is inversely proportional to his power.

However, the evaluation of an Odu's power should be based on both quantitative and qualitative criteria—not only the ratio between visits/recitations and invocations, but also types of visits and recitations that he carries out. As an Odu's ratio of visits/recitations to invocations increases, so does his ratio of initiatory to responsive behaviors. In sum, the first Odu has the highest ratio of initiatory behavior to responsive behavior, while the final Odu has the lowest ratio.

In semiotic terms, both of these ratios are directly proportional to the degree of abstraction in the divinatory process. As an Odu's rank decreases, the degree of his verses' abstraction increases (as do both the ratio of invocations to recitations and the ratio of initiatory to responsive recitations). Based on the cycle of master tropes, the degree of abstraction would theoretically increase from metaphor, to metonymy, to synecdoche, to irony. However, the exact points of transition between different tropes remain uncertain. The only two Odus with a clear correspondence to any trope would be the first and the last, associated with metaphor and irony respectively. The first Odu would correspond with metaphor because it initiates all sixteen pairs of its visits and recitations, thus representing itself in the most direct manner possible for an Odu. Since the last Odu does not initiate any of its sixteen pairs of visits and recitations, it represents itself in the least direct manner possible for an Odu and, thus, corresponds with irony. It may be argued that all of the fourteen intermediate Odus consist of varying combinations of metaphor and irony and, as such, are more accurately categorized as forms of metonymy or synecdoche. But since metonymy and synecdoche represent intermediate stages or combinations rather than cyclical extremes in the manner of metaphor and irony, they may not be represented as precisely in mathematical terms. Incidentally, this

principle could also be applied to the first and last Odu, if not in terms of visits and recitations, then in terms of throws of the palm nuts or opele chain used in the invocation. Since sixteen throws are required for the invocation of any Odu, and the chance of achieving a throw in which all marks are either convex or concave is one in sixteen, the likelihood of achieving a series of sixteen consecutive throws with all sixteen marks either convex or concave—which, in terms of the binary symbolism of palm nuts and the opele chain, would represent absolute metaphor or absolute irony—is one in 256. Given the high unlikelihood of this event, it seems fair to say that, even if the first and last Odu represent metaphor and irony on an overt level in terms of the visits and recitations that they initiate, on a covert level in terms of the types of throws, they correspond with metonymy and synecdoche. In this sense, they are consistent with the proposition of leading nineteenth and twentieth-century philosophers that every text contains varying degrees of all four master tropes.

1.20 The Double Nature of *Meji* (*Eji*)

The word *meji*, which literally means "doubling," is found in compound names of Odu containing two, three, or four occurrences of the same name (Morton-Williams, Bascom, and McClelland 422). In the latter two cases, which involve the tripling or the quadrupling of a name, the application of the word *meji* would constitute meiosis, or understatement. In such cases, it is also a metaphor, since it refers to something other than what it truly is; a metonym and a synecdoche, since it uses the name for a part of the repetitive process—doubling—to represent the whole process—either tripling or quadrupling; and irony, since the varying degrees of accuracy of the term *meji* are

unknown to the uninformed observer. In a way, this word's varying degrees of accuracy in portraying its signified parallels the varying degrees of optimism and pessimism found in the modes of emplotment and explanation that correspond with the master tropes.

In terms of Yoruba tropes, the use of the word *meji* in Odu names may be said to constitute *ndoki*—the artist who creates a fetish or signifier to be (mis)interpreted via the word *meji*, *nkisi*—the fetish itself or the relationship between the signifier *meji* and its signified (double, triple, or quadruple), *nganga*—the expert who adapts the fetish to restore the natural order (in this case, the Babalawo who uses an ambiguous term, but intends and acts upon a specific meaning for the purpose of divination), and *simbi*—an agent that challenges the established tradition by reversing the relationship between the signifier and the signified. In these cases, *meji* is acting not only upon a divination sign used to invoke an Odu, but also upon itself by "doubling" or increasing the number of meanings that it may assume. It has also changed the relationship by eliminating the other component—the contiguous divination sign—that is necessary for a multi-term expression. By doing this, it gives rise to a single-term expression in which it signifies upon itself. Rather than a mere metaphor, it possesses the self-reflexivity, deceptiveness, and indeterminacy commonly associated with irony. Paul de Man claims that literary language's authenticity is found in its persistent tendency to name itself as "fiction"—to acknowledge its own fictionality. He sees it as the origin of the self and that which names the self's nothingness (Riddel 579). With this in mind, *meji* and its double *ejí* may be identified as tropes that represent fiction itself.

As both signs and manifestations of doubleness, *meji* and *ejí* parallel writing. De Man identifies "*écriture*," or writing, as the concept of doubleness represented by the

physical mark. He adds that this sign's only signified is another sign. In effect, one sign may create an endless cycle of signification. He claims that the limitless aspect of literature may be attributed to its disruptive and temporalizing function. It constitutes neither fullness nor emptiness, neither a presence nor an absence. It is not an extreme, but an act of mediation between extremes in the communicative process. Jacques Derrida claims that literature is not an original in itself, but a simulacrum of pre-existing creative thought. While some may consider such thought to exist only in the mind of a text's immediate creator, it is more appropriate to view any thought as originating in the historical field of its predecessors. It is based partly on the displacement and reappropriation of other texts, and anticipates future texts—both emulative and critical—that must supplement it. He adds that the future milieu surrounding any text is, as of yet, undetermined (Riddel 589). This is partly because the form of the text's supplementation by other texts—either via commentary, emulation, or replacement—is not yet known. However, even new texts that aim for a more contiguous relationship with the target text will, in effect, replace some previously existing understanding via their production. Likewise, new texts whose aim is to supplant old ones will never completely succeed in doing so, due to the residual effect of the older texts in commentaries and critiques written about them and in the memories of those who have read them. Thus, regardless of whether a new text's aim is to metonymically co-exist with an older text or to metaphorically replace it, a new text inevitably—if incompletely—does both.

One may say that written literary texts parallel the dissimulating function of the trickster figure Eshu. Their reappropriation of earlier texts parallels the reappropriating function of *nkisi*. Eshu's role as a mediator or messenger, which grants him greater

influence over the message than either its creator or recipient, parallels the "disruptive and temporalizing function" of literature. Both Eshu and *nkisi* reflect conceptual differing—metaphor—and temporal deferring—metonymy. *Nkisi*'s potentially infinite subdivision into previous groupings of ingredients, like a metonym's endless breakdown into a metaphor and another metonym, reflects Derrida's observation that every written sign signifies another sign. This endless division—or doubling of signifieds—expands the potential connotations of any text—or for that matter, any sign—but does not validate or clarify any of them. It dissimulates, defers, and differs. The observation that literature is neither a presence nor an absence—neither full nor empty—reflects the fact that it does not constitute either extreme of the spectrum of totality. It constitutes the relation between extremes as communicated by different signs. While *nkisi* constitutes a relation, so does *simbi*. To put it another way, *simbi* constitutes the anti-relation by token of its reversal of *nkisi*. While it is not fair to say that all literary texts constitute reversals of their creator's thoughts, they do, to a certain extent, constitute dissimulations of these thoughts. The same could be said for the words *meji* and *aji*, for the invocation of the Odus, and for the interpretation of their texts.

1.21 Indeterminacy

The concept of linguistic impermanence is related to the views of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. about tricksters, whom he identifies as conscious forms of the articulation of linguistic traditions. Tricksters demonstrate an awareness of themselves as traditions consisting of history, development, revision, as well as internal principles of patterning and organization (Gates, *Signifying* xx-xxi). Their ability to utilize a self-reflective meta-

discourse explains their status as meta-tropes in different traditions—a phenomenon observed both with Esu-Elegbara in the Yoruba tradition and with the Signifying Monkey in African-American discourse. In addition to symbolizing the nature and function of interpretation, they represent the practice of double-voiced utterance. In Gates' view, the language of Signifyin(g) functions as a metaphor for both formal revision and intertextuality. Formal revision changes a text's meaning explicitly, whereas intertextuality does so implicitly. The latter occurs through references to other texts, events, or people who, as comparative points of reference, cause a text to be interpreted—and, in effect, to signify—differently. Gates also believes that the African-American vernacular, which is integral to the process of Signifyin(g), provides a foundation for formal black literature, contains its own type of indigenous literary criticism, and serves a protective purpose against corruption by those who are not part of the system (Gates, *Signifying* xxi).

Much of the literature about Esu—including praise poems and panegyrics called Oriki Esu, the Odu Ifá, Ifá divinations, or Esu songs—deals with the origin, nature, and function of interpretation and language use at a figurative level. He is the Yoruba meta-figure of formal language use, and of the ontological and epistemological status of figurative language and its interpretation. The literature about him contains many direct references to the levels of linguistic ascent which distinguish figurative from literal language (Gates, *Signifying* 6). His application to the field of linguistics is underscored by the Fon people's reference to him as “the divine linguist” and “he who speaks all languages and interprets the alphabet of Mawu to humans and other gods” (7). A linguistic interpretation of Esu's role has been figuratively associated with some of his

accoutrements. One example is the magical *àshe*—the same that was used by the supreme Yoruba orisha Olodumare to create the universe—which most statues depict being carried in a calabash by Esu. Here, Gates interprets *àshe* to be a symbol of *logos*, which he defines as the word, the audible, the visible, and a sign of reason (Gates, *Signifying* 7). Juana and Deoscoredes dos Santos say that *àshe* is the coherent force of the linguistic process (8). Gates claims that Esu is the black metaphor for the literary critic, or in a broader sense, the interpreter of the text. As the one who taught Ifá the system and who confirms or condemns Ifá's message, Esu takes priority over Ifá in the process of interpretation. In Ifá poetry, it is often said that he appropriated Esu's *àshe* and put it in his own mouth to give a message to the supplicant (9).

One example of linguistic impermanence regarding the Afro-Cuban trickster figure is the transformation of its name over time. The Yoruba in Nigeria refer to the trickster as Esu-Elegbara, whereas the Fon in Benin call him Legba. In the New World, he is called Exú in Brazil, Echu-Elegua in Cuba, Papa Legba (pronounced La Bas) in the loa of Vaudou in Haiti, and Papa La Bas in the loa of Hoodoo in the United States. All of these tricksters are variations of Esu-Elegbara (Gates, *Signifying* 5). Other variations found in South America and the Caribbean include Elegba, Eshu, and Ena. "Ena" is the name used at the beginning of each line in the Bahían Candomblé chant for Elegbara in Brazil. It means "two parts" and alludes to the dual nature of Elegbara's character (Daniel 70). Another variation that is particularly applicable to Cuban literature is the figure of güije or jigüe, generally identified as a black trickster, which is a conflation of the monkey and Esu in Afro-Cuban mythology. There are two types of literature on this figure. In the first, güije is portrayed as a small black man, like in the oral narrative, "El

güije de la Bajada,” found in “Leyendas cubanas” compiled by Salavador Bueno. The two key physical traits of Esu are his very dark color and his very small size. In the second type of literature, which is usually poetry instead of prose narrative, there is the jigüe or monkey. The jigüe’s attributes include dark color, pointed teeth, long hair of the color and type that are typical of descriptions of Esu (Gates, *Signifying* 17). His eyes are similar to Esu’s. Both güije and jigüe are derived from the Efik-Ejagham word for monkey: jiwe (18). The jigüe, Esu, and the monkey are doctors of interpretation (20).

Other manifestations of the *topos* of impermanence are elusiveness, indeterminacy, and ambiguity. Esu is the god of fertility and generation, of the elusive, the barrier between the divine world and the profane. He is often characterized as a habitual copulator—a trait which figuratively parallels his semiotic function. He connects truth with understanding, the sacred with the profane, text with interpretation, the subject with its predicate, the grammar of divination with rhetorical structures. While his walking with a limp appears to be a sign of weakness, it is allegedly due to his mediating function, which requires him to have each leg in a different world (Gates, *Signifying* 6). The Yoruba god Ifa is thought of as the text of divination (20). He is the god of determinate meanings, but his meaning must be communicated by analogy. He is allowed by Esu to name the texts of a tradition, and in a figurative sense he represents both the text and its closure. Esu, on the other hand, is the god of indeterminacy who controls the process of interpretation of Ifá’s texts. Esu represents the ambiguity of figurative language, the uncertainties of explication, the open-endedness of every text, the discourse upon texts, and their disclosure (21). While Ifá is truth, Esu is the understanding of this truth that brings meaning to an individual (39). According to Gates,

the Signifying Monkey represents the rhetorical strategies used in each text to realize a connection. In other words, he represents neither the determinate textual expression of truth nor the figurative interpretation that allows for its understanding, but the linguistic tools that allow for a connection between the two (Gates, *Signifying* 21). It is for this reason that Gates considers the Signifying Monkey to be a trope of literary revision and the African-American master trope (21, 44).

Gates believes that stories of the Signifying Monkey originated in slavery and that its presence in African-American literature is derived from Cuban mythology, where the orisha Echu-Eleggua is portrayed with a monkey at his side (Gates, *Signifying* 51-52). In contrast to Esu and other similar figures in Africa, the Signifying Monkey does not exist primarily as a character in the narrative so much as a vehicle for narration. Both characters are figures of oral writing in the context of black vernacular language rituals. Signifyin(g) is derived from the body of mythological narratives. In contrast to Wittgenstein's depiction of poetry as a rhetorical practice focused on information giving with a transcendent signified, signifyin(g) focuses on the play and chain of signifiers. The Signifying Monkey is referred to as the Signifier or "he who wreaks havoc upon the Signified" (5). Gates believes the Signifying Monkey is descended from Esu-Elegbara, due to their functional equivalency as figures of rhetoric and interpretation (53). A great irony of both figures is that, in spite of their involvement in interpretation, they do not facilitate closure of meaning. Gates identifies the monkey as a master of anti-mediation, or the negation of the initial mediation (56). Since slave narratives are sometimes read as reversals of masters' attempt to transform them into commodities, as well as slaves' acts of witness by which they attempt to show membership in the human community, they

constitute a form of chiasmus (Gates, *Signifying* 128). They also embody the role of the Yoruba concept of *simbi*, by reversing the relationship between signifier and signified.

Further insight regarding the Yoruba trickster's indeterminacy may be found in the Fon folklore of which it is an outgrowth. The primal god of the Fon is a Janus figure. One side of its body—Mawu—is female and rules the night. The other side—Lisa—is male and rules the day. This double deity had seven sons, of which the seventh is Legba—an alternate name for Esu. Legba is the variable of Fon metaphysics, like a wandering signifier. While Legba's six siblings rule over six domains of heaven and earth, Legba rules over all. He exhibits both subtle domination and ubiquitous representation in his role as linguist (Gates, *Signifying* 23). His dual sexuality is an indication of liminality, but also of the transcendence or penetration of thresholds, and the interchange between different universes and different discourses (27). Esu is often referred to as masculine, yet he is considered by the Yoruba to be either genderless or of dual gender. Both his masculine and feminine attributes are graphically depicted in sculpture. He is a dual-gendered Janus figure, reminiscent of his dual parent, Mawu-Lisa. The figures of both parent and child serve as reconciliations of opposites in discourse and symbols of indeterminacy (29). Incidentally, Esu's hermaphroditic status has a semiotic overtone when one considers the etymological origin of the term used to describe it. The female side, metaphorically paralleled by the Greek goddess of love Aphrodite, parallels Esu's insatiable sexual desire, as well as his tendency to place himself in situations which compromise others. The male side, which corresponds with the Greek god Hermes, parallels his status as a messenger and trickster.

Esu represents his power in terms of agency and will. However, his ultimate power, which is even the source of the power of will, is that of plurality, or multiplicity. The other major component of Esu's power—on par with his plurality—is his power to connect the parts. He is the sum of the parts and that which connects the parts (Gates, *Signifying* 38). This can be seen in the belief that he should be invoked and sacrificed to before any other orisha (Barnet, *Cultos* 33, 47; Gates, *Signifying* 38). He is the only one who can set the connected parts into motion. Since the power to connect parts is one definition given for *àshe*, one might say that Esu is the manifestation of *àshe*. Not surprisingly, his role in Yoruba cosmology has a parallel in semiotics. As the dialectical element in the process of criticism, he is the one who connects a text to its interpretation (Gates, *Signifying* 38). In Gates' view, the most fundamental tenet of Yoruba thought is that there are simultaneously three stages of existence: past, present, and the unborn. Esu represents these and makes their simultaneity possible (37).

It has been argued that metonymy, synecdoche, and irony are forms of metaphor, since they are all different ways of comparing two dissimilar ideas. Through the progression of tropes, the forms of representation become increasingly complex, and their comparisons more difficult to comprehend. The final trope, irony, is considered to represent the culmination of this cycle. One reason for this is that, with irony, the relationship between signifier and signified is less explicit than with the other tropes. Put another way, the dissimilarity between a signifier and its signified is at its greatest when irony is used. The concept of *simbi*, the figure of Coco Macaco, and the trickster Esu relate to this in a number of ways.

1.22 Orality vs. Writing

The conflict between orality and writing is a central one in slave narratives. It is related to a myriad of important issues such as the question of single or collaborate authorship; the role of intermediaries who participate in the preparation of the narrative such as amanuenses, translators, and editors; the degree of agency that each of these possesses; and how their work affects the narrative's form, content, and meaning. The degree of this conflict is often magnified in the case of narratives about the lives of Africans or those of African descent, since it parallels cultural differences between their own societies that were primarily oral and those of their European, Arab, or American captors, which utilized writing for propagating historical and literary canons. Most cultures of sub-Saharan Africa functioned primarily as oral societies without written languages. Even in those that had been conquered by literate peoples, such as portions of Northwest Africa under the influence of the Arabs, the spread of literacy was largely limited to members of the cultural and religious elite. As such, it functioned as a status marker, elevating those who could read and write above those who could not.

Interestingly, the ability to express oneself orally also became a status marker of sorts for blacks in slave-holding societies of the Americas. Prior to ending their status as commodities, blacks had to demonstrate themselves as speaking subjects, a goal whose acquisition was severely hampered by restrictions during slavery (Gates, *Signifying* 129). Even for illiterate blacks, such as Esteban Montejo, the ability to transfer one's words into writing facilitated communication with an audience beyond the immediate social setting and was an important step in the process of humanization. They needed to be recognized as fellow humans who possessed emotions and free will and were capable of self-

expression. In effect, both literate and illiterate blacks depended on books about themselves to propagate written transcriptions of their speech to others who would never hear them directly (Gates, *Signifying* 131).

The testimonial, like other oral forms of cultural production, gives the impression of being dependent on collaboration with literate people for inclusion in the broader literary canon. At the same time, it is interesting to observe how the testimonies of certain lettered people end up imitating or being produced according to the rules of oral (unlettered) testimony that lettered people had made possible or authorized (Achugar 58). Both *Autobiografía de un esclavo* and *Routes in North Africa by Abú Bekr eṣ ṣiddīk* [sic] are examples of this phenomenon. Their relatively simple vocabularies and ostensible paucity of rhetorical devices reinforce the narratives' oral quality and enhance their credibility. At the same time, they create a misleading image of illiterate narrators who are dependent on the intervention of white amanuenses to publish their accounts.

The inclusion of the Other who is unlettered, marginalized or silenced does not reduce the testimony or eliminate other enunciating subjects. The literate collaborator may also be considered an enunciating subject and a marginal or silenced Other. He assumes his representation not as a character in the text, but as the mouthpiece (in writing or in social or political struggle) those who are represented by characters in the text but cannot speak for themselves (Achugar 58). While such a collaborator is not totally silenced, as happens to the monkey in Barnet's tale "The Owl and the Monkey," he is still not recognized with a speaking role in the text. Similar to the Signifying Monkey identified by Gates, he manifests himself in the rhetorical strategies used in the narrative's

interpretation and uses these devices to realize his own testimony or that of other individuals of his station.

The chief feature that distinguishes an original testimonial from memory, biography, autobiography, and dialogue is that it almost always comes from an oral exchange. The traces of orality vary from one testimony to another, and in some cases can be re-obtained by the permanence of the initial dialogue. Examples of this may include the use of the second-person subject pronoun in the text or references to what has been said or lived by the interlocutor. In others, such traces can be registered by the permanence of unique registers of oral discourse and transcripts of spoken discourse, vocative particle, or onomatopoeia (Achugar 65). The appearance of orality contributes to the documental effect. It enhances the aura of a text's authenticity by giving the impression of having an unadulterated connection to its original emitter. Further, it implies that fiction does not exist or that it exists only at the smallest level so as not to diminish the truth of what is narrated (66). Since many slaves' writings were direct extensions or formal revisions of speeches, a fact attested to by many ex-slave narrators, it is not surprising that they contain a preponderance of oral qualities (Gates, *Classic* 4).

Table 1.1 Afro-Caribbean Meta-Tropes and Their Correspondence with the Master Tropes

Afro-Caribbean Meta-Trope	Master Trope
<i>Ndoki</i>	Metaphor
<i>Nkisi</i>	Metonymy
<i>Nganga</i>	Synecdoche
<i>Simbi</i>	Irony

Table 1.2 Tropes, Modes of Explanation, Emplotment, and Ideological Implication

Trope	Mode of Emplotment	Mode of Explanation	Mode of Ideological Implication
Metaphor	Romance	Ideographic	Anarchist
Metonymy	Tragedy	Mechanistic	Conservative
Synecdoche	Comedy	Organicist	Conservative
Irony	Satire	Contextualist	Liberal

Table 1.3 Names of Sixteen Principal Odus and Their Figures on the Opele Chain

Name of Odu	Figure on the Opele Chain
Ejiogbe Meji	All nuts concave
Oyeku Meji	No nuts concave
Iwori Meji	Middle two nuts concave
Odi Meji	Outer two nuts concave
Irosun Meji	Top two nuts concave
Owónrin Meji	Bottom two nuts concave
Ọbara Meji	Top nut concave
Ọkanran Meji	Bottom nut concave
Ogunda Meji	Top three nuts concave
Ọsa Meji	Bottom three nuts concave
Ika Meji	Upper middle nut concave
Oturupon Meji	Lower middle nut concave
Otua Meji	Top nut and bottom two nuts concave
Ireṭe Meji	Top two nuts and bottom nut concave
Ọṣe Meji	Top nut and lower middle nut concave
Ofun Meji	Upper middle nut and bottom nut concave

Chapter 2

Juan Francisco Manzano: From Signifier to Signified, and Back Again

2.1 Manzano's Acquisition of Literacy

In *Autobiografía de un esclavo* by Juan Francisco Manzano, the trickster figure's function is crucial to both the protagonist's survival and his acquisition of voice. Perhaps its most fundamental manifestation is Manzano's ongoing, yet largely subversive, efforts to acquire literacy. During his childhood with the Marchioness Justiz de Santa Ana and the Marchioness de Prado Ameno, Manzano not only acquires literacy, but develops a strong capacity for memorization and recitation. He even acquires fame for his ability to recite long passages by famous authors as a form of entertainment for white audiences. While some of his white onlookers may view this as a simple and innocuous pastime—and one pertinent to his role as a sometime entertainer, others interpret it as a means of self-empowerment. His ability to acquire literacy and to mask its empowering effect via the traditional subaltern role of entertainer provides evidence of his trickster status.

Manzano's gradual acquisition of literacy constitutes an important subplot that overlaps with the story of his experience as a slave (Molloy, *Face* 51; Molloy, *Serf* 414). Both main plot and subplot narrate different but related types of *bildungsroman* that mark his transition from childhood to adulthood and from bondage to freedom. While both plots describe processes of empowerment, they do so in ways that may seem both contradictory and counterproductive. The subplot describes Manzano's acquisition of literacy and literary skills that will facilitate both his freedom and professional renown.

However, his highly mimetic strategies may be viewed as an assimilation of a white hegemonic culture rather than the assertion of an African subaltern one. The main plot serves primarily to criticize the oppression under which Manzano lived, yet it is presented as a montage of positive and negative memories, which have differing effects on his desire to escape. According to Ivan Schulman, Manzano "moves between happy and somber notes, thus creating the image of a contradictory being, successively docile, rebellious, sad, euphoric, innocent, and mundane." Although Manzano's loyalty to his owners varies depending on the owner and the particular manner in which she or he treats him at any given moment, Manzano shows a certain degree of loyalty to all of them, including the notoriously cruel Marchioness de Prado Ameno. At times, this seems like an endorsement of the slaveholding system. Manzano's emotional ambivalence that diminishes his willpower stems largely from the alternately generous and cruel behavior of this mistress (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 23). Her occasional beneficence can be seen in the elegant clothing that she provides for Manzano and her invitation for him to join her in attending various forms of entertainment such as theater, dances and other social outings (55). The punishments that she imposes include denial of food, whippings, lockups, placement in the stocks, field work, and a repeatedly broken nose (26, 59, 85, 129). Manzano's numerous references to these events and Madden's decision to include them in his revised version demonstrate a mutual understanding of the rhetorical function of violence. In Latin American writing, the use of violent imagery to justify the termination of slavery is found at least as far back as the sixteenth century where Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas cites concrete examples of atrocities in *La Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (Camacho, *Meta-historia* 45-46).

The generally positive treatment from Manzano's first mistress—the Marchioness Justiz de Santa Ana—and from his parents serves as a counterbalance to the cruelty of his second mistress; yet it also heightens his ambivalence (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 27). His ambivalence regarding his father is influenced partly by his use of the name "Manzano" in place of his father's surname, a decision that was in keeping with the slave custom of taking the surname of one's master (Burton, *Ambivalence* 52; Manzano, *Autobiografía* 24). It is also reinforced by the Marchioness' usurpation of the father's disciplinary authority, "making clear to him which parental rights were his as a father and which were hers as a slaveholder who assumed the role of a mother" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 49). Occasionally, Manzano's father subverts this prohibition on punishment. In one case, after laughing at one of Manzano's paintings, his father punishes him by throwing the painting along with all of his paints and brushes into the river (Burton, *Ambivalence* 8; 67-69). This vacillation between kindness and cruelty makes Manzano uncertain of what treatment to expect from his father, yet it also demonstrates that the rules established by owners may sometimes be broken. In both the subplot and the main plot, dialogism shapes Manzano's cultural and racial indeterminacy, his loyalty to various authority figures, his artistic expression, and ultimately his decision of whether to accept or reject the slaveholding system.

Another element that relates to dialogism and the figure of the trickster in *Autobiografía* is the style of language, which varies significantly between the original in Spanish and later editions in both Spanish and English. The Spanish original is marked by frequent irregularities in spelling, punctuation and syntax in the Spanish original (Molloy, *Serf* 394). Subsequent versions, however, have tried to standardize Manzano's

grammar, diction, and syntax, a practice denounced by multiple critics who see it as an attempt to manipulate his text and erase part of his identity (Shumway 377). Cintio Vitier acknowledges numerous irregularities and mistakes in Manzano's language, but interprets them in a more figurative sense: "These errors inspire respect because they are not, in fact, errors: they are like the actual scars of his body" (qtd. in Burton, *Ambivalence* 60). Like many other critics, he views them as an aspect of Manzano's identity that is better preserved than erased. This figurative interpretation of Manzano's mistakes echoes the symbolic value of the scars on Legba's body. Legba's scars may imply his liminality as an entity that, while divine, may still experience pain and physical dismemberment, not unlike Prometheus of Greek and Roman mythologies. They may also suggest the permeability of his body, which, in a literary context, could refer to the non-fixity of a text and its openness to interpretation. The parallel drawn by Vitier between Manzano's textual errors and corporeal scars could imply changes imposed on the text either by him or by his editors. Michel de Certeau's claim that the body may serve as a kind of memory reiterates its semiotic function. In Certeau's words, "It carries, in written form, the law of equality and rebelliousness that not only organizes the group's relation to itself, but also its relation to the occupiers" (Certeau 227). Here, one may interpret the scars as metonymic markers of the colonial influence imposed on Manzano. In turn, the manner in which the scars—or errors—are treated may signal either submission to or rebellion against such influence.

The prescriptive Spanish grammar against which Manzano's text was inevitably compared, the irregularities that he committed, and their ultimate editorial standardization all relate to what Bakhtin identifies as the perpetual struggle of opposing forces in the

development of a language (Neubauer 539). In a narrative context, this involves both the preservation of the Other and the idea of a central homogenizing "I" against whom the Other raises his story and his discourse (Achugar 56-57). In an autobiography, such a conflict raises the question of whether the homogenizing "I" constitutes one side of the narrator's dualistic identity or represents an editor who has usurped authorship from the original narrator and is revising the narrative from his own perspective. In regard to the issue of the preserving of the Other, it has been suggested that Manzano's use of stylistic elements such as vernacular and misspellings is a reflection of his opposition to the prevailing Spanish culture (Olsen 146). If so, then these linguistic irregularities—particularly in the revised versions of his text where they were "standardized"—may reflect a similar anti-imperialist sentiment on the part of the editors and contribute on a subtle linguistic level to the goal of forming a national Cuban literature (145). In this interpretation, as in those of Molloy and Vitier, the language itself takes on a metaphoric meaning that transcends the boundary of any one word.

Examples of Manzano's linguistic mimesis illustrate the agonistic dialogism between his assimilation of the white hegemonic culture and his desire to achieve agency. It can be found in the descriptions of his private learning and the public exhibition of his skills. His role models included people of different nationalities and both literary and non-literary genres. In the words of Ivan Schulman, Manzano's acquisition of literacy "provided him with the skills that ultimately made him a famous writer in the tradition of the neoclassic Spanish poet, Juan Bautista de Arias y Superilla (1770-1837), whose verses he admired and imitated" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 25). He also memorized the longest sermons of Fray Luis de Granada, whose recitation visitors would come to hear

on Sundays. By the age of ten, he could recite the entire catechism and the vast majority of Fray Luis's sermons (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 49). At this point, he was still illiterate, so his memorization of texts depended on listening rather than reading. Nevertheless, his own description of his repertoire includes a significant degree of literary content: "I also knew many lengthy passages, short plays and interludes, dramatic theory, and stage sets. They took me to see French operas, and I was good at imitating some of them, for which my parents used to receive the allotment of gifts from me that I would collect in the parlor, although it was always more from the sermons" (49-51). While such feats may be impressive, Manzano's possession of mimetic skills is in keeping with their low intellectual status and their stereotypical association of such skills with blacks.

By the age of twelve, Manzano's literary skill had advanced from a mimetic to a creative endeavor, evidenced by his composition of *décimas*. Since he was still illiterate, it was necessary for him to compose these orally and preserve them by memory. The agency apparent in Manzano's creative use of oral language caused his godparents to discourage him from learning to read. This prohibition reflects the common fear among whites of that era that literacy could serve as a tool of empowerment for blacks. However, Manzano dictated the verses from memory to a young mulatta named Serafina for the dual purpose of courting her and preserving his poetic work (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 57).

Manzano's awareness of the obstacles to his learning can be seen in the strategies that he uses to overcome them: "Since I lacked writing skills, in order to study what I was composing I used to talk out loud to myself, affecting gestures and emotions according to the nature of the composition." In some cases, one may also see the trickster-like

approach which he uses to avoid detection: "I did not tell anyone what I was involved in, and only when I was able to join the children did I recite many poems and tell them magical tales with their ditties, all a reflection of the distressing state of my heart and composed by memory during the rest of the day." However, on one occasion, the Marchioness de Prado Ameno, who suspected his ploy, hid in another room and eavesdropped while Manzano was made to recite his poems. The following day, she thrashed him, gagged him, made him sit on a stool in the middle of the parlor while wearing signs on both his front and back, and forbade anyone to speak to him—a punishment which temporarily silenced him in both a symbolic and a practical sense (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 65). Over time, Manzano's efforts to improve his literacy were increasingly discouraged by punishment from whites (Olsen 140). Since literacy and the ability to reason were often included among the criteria for the claim of racial superiority by whites, Manzano's unprecedented status in Cuba as a literate slave and a poet likely caused whites to fear his learning as a threat to the status quo. According to Roberto Friol, the family of the Marchioness de Prado Ameno considered Manzano's study to be libelous and wished to take action against him. In one instance, a gentleman who acted as Manzano's godfather said to his mistress moments before an imminent punishment: "Look here, this one is going to be worse than Rousseau and Voltaire" (Burton, *Ambivalence* 51; Manzano, *Autobiografía* 87), thus, implicitly identifying him as a potential threat by associating him with two anti-imperialist thinkers widely recognized in Cuba at that time. Discouragement of Manzano's learning by whites responds to the broader trend of fear of blacks. This fear is evident in the writings of at least three well known Cuban writers of the period: Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, la Condesa de

Merlin, and Plácido—a free mulatto writer who was ultimately killed, since he was a subversive figure whose writings inspired fear of a slave uprising among whites (Camacho, *Fantasmas* 686-87).

While Manzano acquires the skill of reading with facility and virtually no resistance from his owners, learning to write presents a greater challenge. This is true partly because of writing's status as a productive linguistic skill that requires the creation of visual texts in a language, as opposed to a receptive linguistic skill—such as listening or reading—that does not. Related to this is the fact that one who writes does not merely respond to communication from someone else, but initiates it himself. It may be for this reason that writing has a greater tendency than reading to engender the suspicion of onlookers. Manzano's mastery of writing occurs much later than that of auditory memorization, oral recitation, and reading. He learns to write while living in Havana with Don Nicolás, who, aside from being relatively beneficent in his minimal restrictions and the absence of punishment, provides a studious role model for Manzano to follow. Further, it is through Manzano's use of this master's personal affects that he becomes aware of how different language skills provide varying degrees of empowerment. Manzano describes his learning in the following manner,

I began identifying with his habits so thoroughly that I, too, began my own study regimen. Throughout all the stages of my life, poetry—sometimes happy, sometimes sorrowful—afforded me verses in harmony with my situation. I used his rhetoric books and learned my lesson by heart. I learned it like a parrot and even believed that I knew something. However, I recognized how few were the fruits of my labor, since I never had the opportunity to use the information. It was then that I decided to dedicate myself to something more useful, learning to write. (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 103)

Interestingly, Manzano's decision to learn to write is an outgrowth of his dedicated pursuit of knowledge via reading and memorization. However, it is primarily motivated

by his desire for agency, and his realization that reading and memorization alone will not provide this to a sufficient degree. Thus, his decision may be seen both as a step towards achieving agency and as a sign of psychological development.

In the previously cited passage, there is evidence of both the culmination and the renewal of the cycle of master tropes. While Manzano does not go into great detail about his master's study habits, his thorough familiarization with them suggests an unwritten discourse in his own mind that is both dispersive and idealistic, in accordance with the romantic mode of emplotment. One may also infer that, in keeping with the formist explanatory mode, this unwritten discourse emphasizes the agent—his master, the agency that allows him to conduct his studies—literacy, and the acts that are central to this—reading and writing. Manzano's awareness of different stages of his own life and of their varying emotional tones is indicative of both metonymic contiguity and synecdochic classification. His allusion to these stages may mirror the stages in the cycle of master tropes. The reference to poetry that matches his situation at different stages may also allude both to tropes' poetic nature and to their cyclical tendency toward increasing abstraction and sophistication. In spite of his progress, he ultimately—and ironically—acknowledges both its triviality and futility. Then, he restarts the cycle by revising his perception of agency as something dependent not only on reading but also on writing.

In spite of Don Nicolás' compassion, he is restrictive in a manner that—at least on a symbolic level—serves to thwart Manzano's ambition. After discovering several scraps of paper with Manzano's writing, Don Nicolás orders him to “abandon that pastime, which did not correspond to my class” (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 105). This attitude displayed by his master was typical among slaveholding Cubans who recognized

literacy's potential as a tool of empowerment for slaves. It may also be a rejection of the idea of the "noble savage." Even on the surface, such an idea suggests a process of assimilation, which Don Nicolás seems determined to prevent. However, it may also serve as a criticism of people like Don Nicolás who utilize a superficial degree of permissiveness to strengthen the loyalty of their slaves and, in doing so, maintain the status quo. In spite of this prohibition, Manzano continues to practice writing in secret. When more scraps of paper with verses of poetry copied on them are discovered, Don Coronado, a friend of his master, predicts Manzano's future potential as a poet and indicates that Manzano's acquisition of literacy is similar to that of most slaves (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 105). This reflection constitutes the trope of irony, since it is a negation of both a structure—the social hierarchy—and a practice—the forced preservation of illiteracy—of the slaveholding society, by a member of the slaveholding class, on individual and collective levels. The collective implication here is in keeping with the goal of the slave narrative's editor Richard Robert Madden to utilize Manzano's autobiography as a text representative of the experience of all slaves (Burton, *Liberty* 204; Luis 25; Manzano, *Autobiografía* 23; Ramón 156). In spite of Don Coronado's ostensible optimism, his prediction may be less idealistic than it appears. While literacy, writing, and even publication were achieved by some slaves, the degree and immediacy of agency realized through these accomplishments is questionable. This is partly because the official abolition of slavery in Cuba did not occur until 1880, and its implementation was not fully realized until 1886, over six decades after the initial publication of Manzano's *Autobiografía* (Nodal 254). Even after this, the apprenticeships which were imposed on many former slaves as a transition from slavery to freedom, and the

prolonged second-class status suffered by people of African descent continued to impede their realization of social equality.

In this case, Don Coronado's statement could be read as a paternalistic, cynical—and thus ironic—acknowledgment of Manzano's attempt to subvert the social hierarchy. His awareness of what Manzano assumes to be a secret endeavor, constitutes a new level of irony which trumps that achieved by Manzano. While Don Coronado does not intervene directly in Manzano's writing process—either through the prohibition of it as a pastime like Don Nicolás, or in the revision and translation of his text in the manner of Richard Robert Madden, he parallels them as a member of the prevailing social class. As such, he likely shares their reservations regarding the idea of full equality for blacks. If indeed he shares Don Nicolás' goal of maintaining perpetual illiteracy among blacks, Don Coronado opts for a more subtle approach. By viewing the scraps of paper onto which Manzano has copied poetry, he becomes a reader of Manzano's text. In doing so, he assumes the role of an interpreter of the text and an agent in determining its meaning. He effectively has the power to influence the way in which the text is received by himself or by others, a power which he exercises by making his prediction about Manzano's potential as a poet in the presence of Don Nicolás' family. Here Don Coronado is reminiscent of the trickster, both in his attempt to influence the reception of a text and in his use of potentially ambiguous statements that, depending on their optimistic or cynical interpretation, could serve either to subvert or reinforce the status quo.

In a manner to similar to Manzano's acquisition of other linguistic skills, his mastery of writing is realized in a largely mimetic fashion. After purchasing a penknife, quills and paper, he traced the shapes of letters from discarded sheets written by his

master (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 103). Until his activity was discovered by his master, he would regularly dedicate five hours a day to practicing the formation of letters. Not surprisingly, he claimed that his penmanship resembled that of his master. Even after he was told to replace the hobby of writing with sewing, Manzano, who was already proficient at sewing and usually had materials nearby, merely used it as a foil for his continued pursuit of writing. After others in the house went to bed, Manzano claims that he stayed awake, "copying the prettiest verses from Arriaza, whose writing I always imitated" (105). Manzano's decision to carry out this act in secret illustrates his trickster-like mentality. However, the element of mimesis in Manzano's writing may add another level of irony to Don Coronado's prediction, since the former was, in effect, copying the masters' discourse (Ellis 426).

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of Manzano's writing as described in his autobiography is that, in spite of being more active and less receptive than reading on a tangible level, it is still largely imitative rather than creative. Almost all of the references to his writing in *Autobiografía* are limited to verses copied from other authors. While this does not reflect a limited creative ability, it does show an obsessive fondness for certain models of writing—the neoclassical canon in particular. One might say that his mimetic activities are carried to an extreme. One example of this is his synopsis of his own learning habits: "From early childhood I was in the habit of reading everything legible in my language. And when I walked down the street, I always went along picking up pieces of printed paper, and if it were in verse I would not pray again until I learned it by heart" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 125). When his mistress invited improvisational poets to perform at her house, Manzano would copy the lines that he could remember

from their performances while hiding behind a door. While Manzano obviously prided himself on the transition from reading to writing, there is no evidence here of a transition to compositional writing—an irony made even greater by the fact that the lines which he copied were improvised. In fact, of all the references to his writing in the entire autobiography, only the last one—alluding to the many books of *décimas* which he wrote and sold—shows evidence of original literary composition on his part. Yet even here, his mimetic tendency is still apparent, when he claims that "Arriaza, whose poetry I had memorized, was my guide" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 127).

Manzano's memorization of improvised material and his lack of progress thus far to the creative level of performance are related to Yoruba concepts in several ways. By appropriating texts created by white poets for his own use as a mulatto emulator, Manzano, in a sense, transfers the poems' ownership from their creators to himself. Somewhat ironically, these poems, which were originally performed *ad libitum*—in other words, at the pleasure (and freedom) of the performer—are now recorded *verbatim* in writing in a manner that doubly restricts their freedom, through their high fidelity to the original and their representation in visual form. Manzano's future recitations of the same poems will necessarily lack the improvisational freshness of their debuts. Moreover, their presentation in memorized form smacks of indoctrination and seems counterintuitive to Manzano's ultimate goal of liberation. So far, Manzano's reversal of the improvisational poets' *nkisi*—the relationship between their signifier and their signified, which effectively transforms it into *simbi*, appears to regress from a higher state of discursive sophistication to a lower one, and subtly parallels a return from freedom to bondage. However, it is possible that a more distant goal of Manzano's memorization is

to accumulate a repertoire of vocabulary, stylistic devices, and rhetorical tropes, which, like the ingredients in a Yoruba *nkisi*, he will eventually incorporate into his own original literary works. If so, then he may succeed in creating a new and more profound *simbi*, whose hidden signifieds, like the covert acquisition of their signifiers from behind a door, will grant Manzano, via trickery, a greater degree of discursive, and legal, freedom.

2.2 Manzano's Racial Indeterminacy and Cultural Assimilation

One can see that, in spite of Manzano's suffering at the hands of whites, he is inextricably tied to white culture. He struggles to navigate between the two social milieus of white hegemony and black marginalization. For the most part, he desperately emulates the white culture while condescendingly rejecting the black one. His desire not to be associated with blacks is evidenced by his distancing from darker-skinned slaves while working for both marchionesses, his accompanying of white children to their lessons, and his desire to marry a woman of lighter skin color (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 22). This prejudice is reinforced by Manzano's own father, who forbade him from interacting with other black children (25). However, his reference to himself as "a mulatto among blacks" (24) suggests that, although he does not consider himself to be black, in a broader sense he is still grouped with blacks rather than with Creoles and Spaniards. He voices his frustration regarding his racial displacement in a letter written to Del Monte's wife during his jail term. Interestingly, this imprisonment resulted from his false accusation for participating in the Ladder Conspiracy of blacks and mulattos against the Spanish colonial system (29-30).

Manzano's self-denigration and his constant desire for self-improvement are likely influenced by the views of his mentor, Domingo del Monte. The leader of an influential literary tertulia, and an important agent in the publication of Manzano's autobiography, Del Monte still held a bias against slaves and all people of African descent. This sentiment is made clear in his own text, *Escritos*:

A person who is born and brought up as a slave whatever his color or race, must be, because of this state, base, stupid, and immoral; and to have these defects is as much part of his basic nature as it is the sun's to shine, and solid bodies' to find the center of their gravity when they are thrown into space. One of the redeeming aspects of human nature, to be sure, is that there are races, such as the Ethiopian, in which one finds generous exceptions to this rule, but they are not sufficient to change it, for to do so would upset the admirable order that Providence has placed in the governance of the world (Del Monte, *Escritos* 2:43; Manzano, *Autobiografía* 23).

In this passage, Del Monte is adamant that slaves' inferiority is an innate and unchangeable quality manifest in their behavior, intellect and morality. By attributing these qualities to slaves' upbringing, he portrays them as the result of a person's experience and explicitly states that they apply to all slaves regardless of race. However, the very same sentence is ambiguous if not self-contradictory since it presents these qualities as intrinsic and immutable, rather than acquired. At first, the main recipients of his denigration are slaves in general, rather than Africans in particular. However, his metonymic identification of Ethiopians as a group in which one may find exceptions to the rule suggests that Africans in general tend to possess the same traits that were earlier associated with slaves (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 36). Furthermore, the "admirable order" maintained by this rule is probably a thinly veiled reference to the social hierarchy upon which the slave-based economy was dependent.

Feelings of ambiguity regarding blacks' status were shared by other members of Del Monte's tertulia. Evidence of this may be seen in the following excerpt from a letter written to Del Monte by Felix Tanco y Bosmeniel on May 13, 1836, in which Tanco expresses his fear of what might become of Cuba if blacks continued to be imported:

What hopes Mr. D. Domingo of that our land will improve with literature, nor with counsels, nor with civil Governors, nor with provincial Deputations, nor with Assemblies, nor cowards and more cowards while we are becoming confused with blacks everywhere? What civilization of my sins, nor that progress has to be among us, if this is a land of infidels; the most abominable region of the earth? God permit that these tribes of blacks all be converted into tigers, bears, serpents and into every carnivorous and wild animal, and to do not leave alive anyone of the condemned Caucasian race that lives on the Island.— (Del Monte, *Centón* 4: 75)

This letter makes clear that Tanco's opposition to the slave trade was not due to his belief in racial equality but to his concern for the island's potential degradation as a result of a continued influx of blacks. His mention of literature as one of several mediums generally considered useful for the improvement of society is not surprising, given his membership in a literary tertulia. This reference is also curious, since literature—in conjunction with literacy—was a highly sought after—and frequently denied—tool for the purpose of achieving emancipation. Here Tanco suggests that no combination of civilizing agents will sufficiently compensate for blacks' negative qualities. This observation may be a subtle hint by Tanco that, in spite of Manzano's literary achievements, he will never be considered the equal of whites—a feeling shared by other white members of the Del Monte tertulia that gradually led to their disaffection from Manzano. In the second half of this excerpt, Tanco's fear of blacks is made clear, if in a somewhat exaggerated manner. His use of the word *cafreria*, derived from the Arabic word *kafir*, meaning "infidel," suggests that Cuba is in danger of becoming a society of infidels if it is

overtaken by blacks. The state of confusion, sinfulness, and backwardness that he insinuates tie into the commonly held belief that blacks are uncivilized. His prejudice and use of hyperbole culminate in the suggestion that God might permit blacks to turn into carnivorous wild animals that would exterminate Cuba's white population. Whether this last possibility is intended as a fear or a gracious form of release remains unclear. In either case, it underscores his opposition to increasing the black population.

Like Del Monte, Tanco shows conflicting emotions regarding the civilizing potential of blacks. In spite of his blatant expression of prejudice in the aforementioned letter, he demonstrates a much more egalitarian perspective in other letters. In one addressed to Del Monte on June 28, 1836, he presents a poem that touches on the topic of racial inequality and its potential causes. The second and third stanzas are quoted below:

That Filis so cultured and finicky
In her tenderness romantic and vain,
Sees at her feet a hundred creatures prostrate
Rational like her, that trembling
What maleficent idol they propitiate,
At the force of humility and vileness.

She in such haughtiness, of her race
Forms sublime thought, and judges,
According to the inherited traditions,
And of the plebs the malignant opinion,
Inferior animal or clumsy beast

To her negro, who is so by being a slave,

And not because she was born far off in Mandinga. (Del Monte, *Centón* 4: 83)

The second stanza contains a depiction of the subject, Filis, whose traits of tenderness and cultivation suggest a stark contrast with numerous blacks prostrate at her feet. While "criaturas," the term used to refer to slaves in the original Spanish text, may be a term of endearment, it can also suggest subhuman status. The distinction of these "criaturas" is reinforced by their physical posture of submission, their humility, and their suggested appeasement of an evil idol. However, they are also identified as rational beings, thus suggesting a similarity to their owner. In the third stanza, Tanco satirizes the owner for her conceit and her judgment of blacks, which are based on inherited traditions rather than on rational evaluation. He adds that blacks' image has been misshapen by the uniformed customs of the general populace. In both stanzas Tanco juxtaposes portrayals of blacks and whites. Finally, he suggests that the true cause of blacks' inferior status is not their biological origin, as was commonly believed, but rather their dehumanization as slaves. The fourth and final stanza also emphasizes the potential goodness of blacks, yet it has a more pessimistic tone:

What does it serve

That she display the exterior adornments

Of the civil education? Do they inspire

Love and wonder, if on the piano

They sing and play; if in dancing they show

Grace and natural agility, that in this

Something perhaps from Africa comes to us? (Del Monte, *Centón* 4: 83)

Much like the comments in Tanco's letter to Del Monte from the previous month, this stanza suggests that no amount of civilizing effort will improve the true nature of blacks. After listing traits that are normally associated with aristocratic Cuban culture, he suggests that even if acquired by blacks, these will be worth nothing if they are corrupted by a residual of African culture. The conflicting sentiments in the writings of both Tanco and Del Monte reveal a lingering undercurrent of anti-African bias. This does not go so far as to discredit the two men's recognition of certain abilities and talents among blacks, many of which are highlighted in Manzano's *Autobiografía*. However, it does suggest that the evidence of artistic potential among certain blacks does not constitute their full equality with whites as humans. Further, it is in keeping with the belief popular at the time, that when such talent is exhibited by people of African descent, it is an anomaly and should not be used as the basis of generalizations.

In yet another letter, Tanco reiterates his belief in the humanity and civilizing potential of blacks via the subject of poetry. He implies that blacks' capacity to create poetry is evidence of their humanity:

I have told you a thousand times: there is no other *poetry* among us than the *slaves*; *poetry* that is spreading everywhere, in fields and populations, and the only ones who do not see it are those who are inhumane and stupid; and warn that gradually it is *civilizing* although slowly the white class that is still very untamed, the enslavement of blacks will increase in the same proportion, as a deformed form, mutilated, horrifying; but poetic and beautiful, and capable of producing creative talents as vigorous and original as that of Byron and Vico Hugo— Who knows how many slaves will one day owe their liberty to the poets! Because well advised, what else is *Poetry* but an exquisite and delicate sensitiveness of the soul? (Del Monte, *Centón* 4: 100-01)

Here, Tanco alludes to an innate capacity for poetry among blacks and suggests that their achievements may one day equal those of the greatest names in the European literary canon. He also compares it analogically with blacks' transition from slavery to freedom,

as well as with the gradual education of ignorant whites. His use of the word "bozalona" to describe certain white people is derived from the term "bozal" meaning a person who could not speak Spanish fluently. This word also alludes to the *bozal* culture brought to the Caribbean by African slaves and adopted by some creoles and whites. Thus, it is somewhat ironic that in a letter whose main thrust is to celebrate the civilizing potential of blacks, the negative epithet used to describe ignorant "uncivilized" whites is also an etymological reference to an African-based culture.

While the ostensible purpose of this passage is to decry the abuse meted against blacks and celebrate their poetic potential and human equality, it may also contain subtle implications that blacks are inferior. If so, it would be in keeping with the common prejudice against blacks—shared by Del Monte, but would be less likely to offend those who believed in racial equality. Many white writers of this period discouraged blacks from writing because they considered their writing to be a poor imitation of white language. While mimetic writing and speech were common among blacks who sought to assimilate the metropolitan white culture, almost all blacks lacked a comparable level of formal education. As a result, their writing and speech was less refined, and was frequently satirized by whites on the basis of its alleged inferiority and its obsessively mimetic nature. One well known example of this is the book *Negros catedráticos*, which mocked attempts by blacks to imitate the eloquence stereotypically associated with white academics. Del Monte may have exploited Manzano's *Autobiografía* and his other works—albeit somewhat ironically—for this same purpose. Granted, Del Monte carried out significant revisions to Manzano's works in the genres of prose, poetry, and drama. Yet to a certain degree, one may still see signs of both limited and incorrect language use.

Del Monte's letter is filled with ambiguous statements that reiterate the indeterminacy of his stance regarding blacks. One example is his use of the phrase "the enslaved among the blacks could rise up," which could refer either to their upward socio-economic and cultural mobility, or to the threat of their uprising against their owners. Similarly, the words "a deformed form, mutilated, horrifying," (Del Monte, *Centón* 4: 100-01), which occur later in the same sentence, could refer to their bodies after the hardships of slavery, their lack of proficiency in Spanish, or their allegedly crude attempts to produce poetry. This statement could serve to sympathize with blacks and criticize the system of slavery that has dehumanized them. However, it could also serve to mock their cultural imperfections and imply that they are inherently inferior to whites. His reference to the enslavement of blacks could also be a metaphor for their subjugation to white linguistic and literary traditions. While he seems to acknowledge blacks' need for liberation, his association of their social mobility and possible rebellious uprising with their linguistic and literary development acknowledges their potential to achieve agency for either beneficent or maleficent purposes and thus leaves their status as fellow humans indeterminate.

In spite of the very limited references to Manzano's linguistic imperfections in *Autobiografía*, commentary about his prodigious poetic and dramatic publications shows that they were largely considered mediocre on the basis of linguistic and stylistic errors. Thus, Del Monte's goal in allowing these works to be published in their flawed state may have been to satirize Manzano's emulation of language typically used by whites and, in doing so, to reinforce the stereotype of his—and by extension, all blacks'—inferior status.

The ambiguity of Tanco's opinion regarding the status of blacks is not limited to their emulation of white language and culture. It may also be seen in their influence on whites. Tanco comments on this in another letter to del Monte:

The epigraph is very well chosen and adequate to the issue: I only wish the title were different, so that it announced better the importance of the work. Also I wish that in the fifth part, you would say something about the influence of slaves not only in the customs, the riches, the intellectual faculties of whites, according to the plan of Comte but in the language, since as you know there has been introduced an infinity of words and locutions, inhuman and barbarous, that are of current use in our societies among both sexes that are called cultured and fine. The same influence is observed in our dances, and in our music. Who does not see in the movements of our young men and women when they dance the contradances and walses, an imitation of the mimicry of the blacks en their *guilds*? Who does not know that the basses of the dancers of the country are the echo of the drum of the *Tangos*? Everything is African, and the innocent and poor blacks, without pretending, without any force other than that which is born from the life of the relation that they are in with us, comes from our cruel treatment corrupting us with the innocent uses and manners, belonging to the savages of Africa— . (Del Monte *Centón*, 4: 107-08)

Here Tanco identifies blacks' influence on the wealth, the intellect, the language, music and dance. Ironically, he indicates that many words of African origin previously considered inhuman and barbarous are now thought to symbolize cultivation and finesse by the prestigious social organizations of both sexes. In these excerpts from the writings of Del Monte and Tanco y Bosmeniel, one can sense a mutual ambivalence regarding the integration of blacks in Cuban society. According to Homi Bhabha in his book, *The Location of Culture*, "the dominant discourse constructs "otherness" in such a way that it always contains a trace of ambivalence or anxiety about its own authority" (Burton, *Ambivalence* 8). Del Monte's anxiety about the authority of the white hegemonic culture in Cuba is reflected in his suggestion of the possible upset of the "admirable order." It also mirrors the feelings of characters in *Autobiografía* who discouraged Manzano's

pursuit of literacy, and those of other members of the Del Monte tertulia, who accepted, and even celebrated, Manzano's literacy, but only within certain parameters.

Another way in which Del Monte and other members of his tertulia shaped Manzano's *Autobiografía* was through their editing. Reformist though not openly abolitionist, Del Monte's group aimed to bring about gradual changes within the existing socio-political structure (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 17; Molloy, *Serf* 395). Del Monte preferred a solution mediated by Spain, either through representation in the Spanish Cortes, or through the granting of increased freedoms on the island. He viewed these as the only alternatives to a war of independence, which he feared would lead to a slave uprising and throw the island into chaos (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 17). Further, he did not approve of British-style abolition because it would free all of the slaves and he had personal property at stake as a plantation owner" (Branche 73). Members of the tertulia encouraged and assisted Manzano in various literary endeavors, the greatest of which is generally considered to be his autobiography. Its initial version was edited and translated by Madden and is speculated to have been published in either 1835 or 1840 (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 32; Molloy, *Serf* 395). Del Monte requested that Manzano write his autobiography to publicize the cause of abolition (Molloy, *Serf* 395). Manzano complied, but divided his text into two separate parts, only one of which is currently extant (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 28). Del Monte also intended for the text to be included in a dossier being compiled for Richard Robert Madden, who in his capacity as British magistrate and superintendant of liberated Africans, served as arbiter in the Court of Mixed Commission, established in Havana in 1835. After the completion of Manzano's autobiography, it was edited by another member of the tertulia, Anselmo Suárez y

Romero, who also authored the abolitionist novel *Francisco*, included in the same anti-slavery dossier. Manzano's autobiography became the property of Del Monte and circulated clandestinely, to the point that it was well known within his social circle. However, it was considered unpublishable for political reasons until at least 1898, by which point it had been largely forgotten (Molloy, *Serf* 395-96). It was inherited by Del Monte's heirs, and published for the first time in its complete form in 1937. Prior to this, Madden's translation was the only one available to the public. Given the text's principle role for Manzano as a tool of self-empowerment, the degree to which the tertulia appropriated it in terms of content and ownership is highly ironic (396).

Manzano's two principal mediators were Del Monte as instigator and Madden as translator. Del Monte had served as Manzano's literary mentor since before the autobiographical project and was highly sought after as an advisor by many young writers. Manzano's letters in response to Madden's critiques show unconditional faith in his literary opinion, extreme gratitude and almost total reliance, all of which grant Del Monte an unusual degree of power over Manzano's work (Molloy, *Serf* 397). It is possible that Manzano's obsequious attitude was intended partly to gain Del Monte's assistance in securing his manumission. In a letter written to Del Monte on December 11, 1834, Manzano reiterates his inferior status and dependence on the former by comparing himself to a leaf and Del Monte to a powerful tree (398):

Each leaf that fallen
from the golden young tree
murmurs with the wind
from under the green thicket (Manzano, *Escritos* 122).

It is likely that this gesture was intended to place both his literary work and his freedom in his mentor's hands. The manner in which Del Monte benefitted from his association with Manzano was complex. While he held liberal views on slavery, he could, when feeling threatened, display a much more biased view against blacks (Molloy, *Serf* 398-99). To defend himself against accusations of his implication in the Ladder Conspiracy of 1843—the same conspiracy with which Manzano was unfairly accused of complicity, for which he was imprisoned for one year, Del Monte confirms that he wants to abolish slavery, but then adds his desire to banish all slaves from Cuba. In this letter, he refers to blacks as "one of the most backward races in the human family" and hopes that their absence will allow Cuba to become "the most brilliant beacon of civilization of the Caucasian race in the Spanish American world" (399). In another piece of correspondence, he reiterates his prejudice against blacks, and displays his anxiety regarding them in his explanation of the plan of their conspiracy: "In the final analysis, this plan amounted to the destruction, by fire, of sugar mills and other country estates, and to the destruction, by knife and poison, of all white men, so as to take pleasure in their daughters and wives with impunity and then establish a Black republic on the island, like the one in Haiti, under England's protectorate" (Molloy, *Serf* 399; Del Monte, *Centón* 3: xxxii; Del Monte, *Escritos* 12: 190-91). Nevertheless, in his collaboration with Manzano, Del Monte took a seemingly more sympathetic approach by seeking to display the terrible excesses of slavery and reflecting the view of an enlightened middle class—albeit vicariously—via the account of a slave (Molloy, *Serf* 399).

The degree of Manzano's conformity to Del Monte's ideology is impossible to determine. While it is possible that he downplayed his own rebelliousness, exaggerated

his docility, or simply lost the will to resist, an equally logical conjecture is that, over the course of his oppressive experiences, self-censorship had become second nature to him (Molloy, *Serf* 400). His anxiety regarding certain types of self-expression is evident in a letter that he writes to Del Monte on June 25, 1835, in which he explains why his requested autobiography has not yet been submitted (Molloy, *Face* 42): "However, when I finally got something down on paper (even skipping four or five years) I still hadn't gotten to 1820, but I hope to finish soon by sticking to only the most interesting events. About four times, I was ready to give up; a portrait filled with so many calamities seems to be nothing more than a massive record of deceits" (Manzano, *Life* 14-15). While the awkward syntax, missing punctuation, and run-on sentences typical of Manzano's prose may reflect his lack of formal education, they also communicate a sense of urgency. In addition, they also reflect the anxiety-inducing nature of composing an autobiography, which involves a different kind of self-reflection than the composition of poetry, and a greater emphasis on credibility (Molloy, *Serf* 401-02).

In a subsequent message written three months later, on September 29, 1835, in response to Del Monte's letter, Manzano's writing shows evidence of both linguistic and psychological development. Even the opening lines show signs of these differences: "From the moment that I saw in it what Your Grace requested from me, I have prepared myself to write for Your Grace a part of the history of my life reserving its most interesting events, for if some day I find myself seated in some corner of my country, at peace, assured of my fate and of my livelihood, to write a truly Cuban novel" (Manzano, *Escritos* 126; Molloy, *Face* 43; Molloy, *Serf* 402). Although this letter contains orthographical and grammatical errors, the syntax is more refined. Also, Manzano's tone

is more confident, more optimistic and, thus, more suggestive of agency than of dependency. While still a slave, he speculates about a time when he will be free. Moreover, he includes among his goals the writing of "a truly Cuban novel." While this proposal is suggestive of agency, it is highly idealistic, especially for a slave in the pre-nascent stage of his country's nationhood. Thus, it may be more reflective of Del Monte's desire to create a national discourse, than of any personal goal on Manzano's part.

In the second paragraph of the letter written on September 29, Manzano alludes to a conversation with a mutual acquaintance, Doctor Don Dionisio, in which the latter acknowledges Manzano's status as a novelty: "I saw by chance on the street Doctor Don Dionisio I spoke to him about the matter and he told me not to worry, that he would not forget me because he had an interest in some Europeans seeing that he was right to speak of a slave in his house, a poet, whose verses he recited from memory, and some doubted that they were by one without education" (Manzano, *Escritos* 126). One can see that Manzano is conscious of his own status as an anomaly. Here, in contrast to the letter written in June, 1835, he shows greater assertiveness by speaking as the author of his own text, in control of its production and aware of its fictional potential. While the first letter granted Del Monte full access to the autobiography and full control over it, the second letter written in September shifts more of its control to Manzano. A prime example of this is Manzano's implication that some of the most important material may be withheld from his literary submission to Del Monte, potentially to be saved for the book that he plans to write after obtaining his freedom (Molloy, *Serf* 403). While some of the numerous lacunae in the text are due to Del Monte's extensive revision, others are likely due to Manzano's initial withholding, both in regard to specific events and general

time periods. Manzano's role in editing his own work is alluded to by Richard Robert Madden in his Preface to *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave*: "I have endeavoured to put into English verse; and to the best of my ability, have tried to render, so as to give the sense of the writer (sometimes purposely obscured in the original) as plainly as the spirit of the latter, and the circumstances under which these pieces were written, would admit of" (Manzano, *Life* 37). While Madden's anthology of Manzano's work was not published until five years after the initial publication of *Autobiografía*, his statement in its Preface appears to corroborate the reality of Manzano's increased influence in his own literary representation. The assertive tone of Manzano's letter, its specific proposals, and the evidence of Manzano's editorial activity as implied by Madden all suggest a shift in the hierarchical relationship between Manzano and Del Monte, as well as an increase in the potential of Manzano's self-determination.

Another gesture that serves to diminish the hierarchical disparity between Manzano and Del Monte is the mention of the former's own fame as an author. By claiming that white men know his poems by heart, he reverses the mimetically based hierarchy that provided the foundation for his own learning (Manzano, *Escritos* 126). In a sense, his statement acknowledges the fulfillment of Del Monte's prediction about the development of black poetry and its influence on the broader population. Perhaps to reiterate this hierarchical shift, Manzano utilizes the testimony of Doctor Don Dionisio—a white professional and former master—to corroborate his own claim, in a manner reminiscent of Del Monte's exploitation of Manzano's testimony to further his own political ends.

In spite of the increasing assertiveness evident in his second letter to Del Monte, Manzano still cedes some power, merely by submitting his text to the members of Del Monte's tertulia. Further confirmation of Manzano's loss of agency may be seen in revisions made by Madden. One of his initial changes is to "unauthorize" (Molloy, *Serf* 404) the autobiography by making it anonymous, and to give it the new title, *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave* (Manzano, *Life* 38; Molloy, *Serf* 404-05). Madden claimed that his unauthorization of the text served to protect Manzano. However, this is unlikely, since numerous textual clues and Manzano's unique reputation as a slave poet could easily reveal his identity. More likely, Madden carried out this change in order to make the text more representative of the experience of all Cuban slaves—a goal that he alludes to in his introductory comments (Burton 204; Luis 25; Manzano, *Life* 23; Molloy, *Serf* 405; Ramón 156). Madden does refer to a goal of his writing, as seen in the following passage from his Preface to *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave*:

I am sensible I have not done justice to these Poems, but I trust I have done enough to vindicate in some degree the character of negro intellect, at least the attempt affords me an opportunity of recording my conviction, that the blessings of education and good government are only wanting to make the natives of Africa, intellectually and morally, equal to the people of any nation on the surface of the globe (Manzano, *Life* 37).

Although he indeed claims to use Manzano as a metonymic representation of all blacks, in this context he refers only to a vindication of their intellect, and not to a description of their daily experience. From this excerpt, one may infer that Madden was more optimistic than either Del Monte or Tanco y Bosmeniel regarding the potential equality of blacks with whites.

The use of an individual to represent a group is in keeping with a reason stated by Molloy for treating Spanish-American autobiography as a public story: the prioritization

of serving the public interest over satisfying the individual's need to speak for himself (Molloy, *Face* 82). It is also enlightening about Madden's practice of reading, which is typical of the way that people in power often perceive texts written by others who are judged as weaker or insignificant (Molloy, *Serf* 405). By perceiving differences *en bloc* rather than on an individual basis, it becomes easier to categorize an author, to depersonalize him, and thus to usurp his agency (406). A key measure by Madden that may have facilitated Manzano's depersonalization was the omission of his name. Madden states in the Preface that "His name, for obvious reasons, I think it advisable not to publish" (Manzano, *Life* 38) and subtly alludes to him only once as "el poeta J. F. M." (39) at the end of the Preface. The omission of a slave's name augments existing power disparities by depriving him of his identity and by symbolizing his voicelessness on a new level. Another drawback in Manzano's case was that it led some North American writers to confuse him with a more famous mulatto poet named Plácido. That this confusion yielded interesting hybrid biological sketches of the two authors is all the more ironic, given Madden's probable goal of representation (12). Such an amalgamation of drawings echoes on a visual level the interweaving of literary components in the narrative by members of the Del Monte tertulia. Although unintended, it effectively depersonalizes Manzano's image even further.

Beyond the elision of Manzano's name, Madden made a number of other changes that significantly diminish the latter's role in textual creation. To begin with, the autobiography was incorporated into a larger book, most of which was written by Madden himself. It includes two lengthy poems by Madden which denounce slavery; a severely truncated version of the "Life of the Negro Poet Written by Himself;" selections

from "Poems, Written in Slavery by Juan...", which Madden translated and adapted into English; a conversation between Madden and Del Monte; and various documents written by Madden against the slave trade (Molloy, *Serf* 406). In sum, roughly three quarters of the pages in this conglomeration of texts were written by Madden, with the remainder being composed by Manzano. Yet Madden's intervention goes even further. He omitted family names, place names, and dates. He altered the order of events, probably to present Manzano's suffering as a continuum of increasing intensity, unlike the text in Spanish, which intersperses the brutalities with more positive experiences. Ironically, Madden's linear presentation, while intended to emphasize the element of suffering, overlooks the arbitrary and unpredictable nature of Manzano's suffering, a key aspect of his powerlessness. Many of Madden's alterations center on elements that he may have considered contradictory to either Manzano's suffering or his inferiority. These include Manzano's distinction of himself from other slaves, his confused allegiances, his dialogical sense of two-ness drawing from both biological and behavioral factors, his status as head servant, and a long period without suffering during which he actually speaks in defense of the Marchioness de Prado Ameno in response to accusations made against her by other slaves (406-07).

Another type of change, which may also serve to subtly reinforce the social inequality between blacks and whites via the generalization of the latter, is Madden's omission of details regarding Manzano's person. Details on Manzano's desires and tastes are omitted, with the exception of certain literary tastes, and his broader desires for literacy and freedom. According to Ivan Schulman, the Del Monte group wished to portray a *negro racional* or *criada de razón* (the same epithet that Manzano used to

describe his mother) who appeared non-threatening, and thus catered to the preferences of the more conservative members of the slaveholding elite. Allegedly this group justified the slave's tyrannization to avoid the risk of being tyrannized themselves in the event of a slave uprising and takeover (Molloy, *Serf* 399). In doing so, they demonstrated the same anxiety regarding slaves' potential agency as did Del Monte and all of the owners mentioned by Manzano in his autobiography. Details of Manzano's discussions with Madden between 1836 and 1839 show that he had developed specific interests, some of which were different from those Madden and other members of the Del Monte tertulia. The two men discussed Voltaire in their private meetings, and Manzano was said to enjoy his works. However, Madden allegedly discouraged him from reading them, probably because of their anti-imperialist sentiment (Burton, *Ambivalence* 51).

2.3 The Residual

An important, if enigmatic, aspect of Manzano's experience is the function of the residual. Perhaps its most obvious role is in Manzano's assimilation of white Cuban culture. At times, the residual effects of white culture are forced on him in the form of leftover clothes in which his owners dress him. At other times, it is the result of activities which his owners dictate, such as attendance at theatrical productions, but which Manzano voluntarily perpetuates through his memorization and recitation of sermons, short plays, French operas dramatic theory, and other literary texts (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 49-51). In still other cases, it involves Manzano's surreptitious access to materials left over from his masters, some of which are forbidden to him. Some of these, such as food and drink, satisfy his immediate need for sustenance. Others, such as books

and materials for sketching and writing, are aimed to facilitate his assimilation into white society and ultimately to earn his emancipation by writing his autobiography. In some cases, the residual is manifest in seemingly trivial forms such as a coin or a geranium leaf, which, notwithstanding their insignificance, yield disastrous results when they are discovered by the Marchioness. Occasionally, mostly in verbal contexts, the residual is derived from Manzano and subsequently adopted by others more powerful than he.

The residual function of clothing may be seen both in the context of punishments and in his various domestic roles where Manzano is exploited for his mistresses' amusement. His first mistress, the Marchioness de Justiz, regards him as "the child of her old age" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 47; Molloy, *Serf* 408), christening him in the christening robes of her own daughter and holding him in her arms more than his own mother was allowed to do. His second mistress, the Marchioness de Prado Ameno, forced him to undergo elaborate rituals of dress, as evident in the following quotation: "For special occasions I wore an outfit with wide, scarlet pants trimmed in gold braid; a short jacket without a collar, made of navy-blue satin adorned the same way; a black velvet cap with a black tip embellished with braid and red feathers; two gold French-style rings; and a diamond pin. With all this and more I soon forgot my old, austere lifestyle" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 55). This clothing, far more elegant than that worn by most slaves, contributes to his confused sense of identity, as a result of both its uniqueness and its subjection to the Marchioness' will (Molloy, *Serf* 408-09). Such clothing serves to make him less like other blacks or mulattos and more like whites—at least in a cultural sense. It may serve to impose white cultural influence on a black body in order to mask or overpower what are perceived as black tendencies. At the same time, Manzano

willingly accepts this imposition since he sees it as a way to improve his status by emulating his socio-economic superiors. While he does not have to acquire these accoutrements surreptitiously—in contrast to his acquisition of reading and writing materials and certain food items—his receipt and use of them is reminiscent of a scavenger.

The function of Manzano's attire in this setting is ambiguous for several reasons. First, the very same outfit that sets him apart from other blacks through his assimilation of white culture is in some ways reminiscent of the Harlequin—a figure commonly associated with blacks. In white satirical publications found in both the Caribbean and the United States, the Harlequin figure has been used to demean blacks by connoting traits such as childlike playfulness and simplicity. Its function in these contexts exemplifies the observation by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. that images of slaves and blacks as childlike, masked, puppet-like, all suggest an absence of memory—an idea which parallels the belief common in the nineteenth century that blacks had no history (Gates, *Reader* 220-21). The attribution of these deficiencies to blacks' lack of writing system—as purported by Hegel, Hume and Kant—may help explain efforts by various of Manzano's owners to discourage acts which could facilitate his acquisition of literacy (220). That such efforts sometimes involve the retraction of the Harlequin-reminiscent clothing underscores the ambiguous function of Manzano's attire and of the cultural figure that it evokes.

If the demeaning connotations of the Harlequin are perceived by readers, then such sartorial steps in the process of whitening could simultaneously, and ironically, imply Manzano's dehumanization. Nevertheless, his donning of white clothing in this

instance may also carry a subtext of black resistance. Both of these counterintuitive interpretations relate to the trope of invisibility, which is central to the black literary tradition. Due to its indeterminate function as a sign of strength or weakness, invisibility is ambiguous. It also relates to the Harlequin figure who could allegedly point to a black patch on his suit and become invisible. The Harlequin has parallels with both the Ñañigo in Cuba and the Yoruba trickster figure Eshu, both of which are associated with African culture and resistance against metropolitan oppression (Gates, *Figures* 51). The red feathers that Manzano is made to wear may also be significant. Through their shape and potential use as quills, they may symbolize writing ability and sexual potency respectively, both of which suggest forms of self-perpetuation and contradict the slave's stereotype as a dead entity. The two types of performativity evoked by the feathers are also typical traits of the Yoruba trickster Eshu, who, incidentally, includes a feather among his accoutrements. In Yoruba culture, a *nkisi* often contains feathers, particularly of raptors, to create a headdress that is worn by the *nganga*. Feathers are included because of the common association of birds and other flying animals with spiritual forces (MacGaffey, *Complexity* 193). Given the common belief among African slaves that committing suicide would allow their spirits to fly back to Africa, the inclusion of feathers in Manzano's ensemble may be a subtle reference to escape by this method.

In punitive contexts, such as his forced change of clothing prior to trips to work at the sugar mill, the idea of the residual is negated. In these instances, Manzano's domestic finery—representative of the white residual influence—is removed, his hair is sheared, his feet bared, and he is dressed in the hemp gown of a field laborer—representative of the most humble station within the slave hierarchy, after which he is tied up and taken to

the mill (Gates, *Figures* 409). In terms of his appearance, social milieu, function and agency, any trappings of white culture are removed. For this reason, the ritual that he undergoes may be termed metamorphic—albeit in a negative sense. From a white metropolitan cultural perspective, which was the norm for most of his contemporary readers, such changes suggest helplessness and victimization on Manzano's part. From a black subaltern cultural perspective, however, they may suggest a type of subtle power. His shabby appearance is reminiscent of the attire typically associated with the trickster god Legba—at least in those portrayals of him which are set in the natural world. When appearing in the natural world, Legba uses the clothing of a pauper to mask his power and to engender sympathy from onlookers. While Manzano does not promote himself as an equivalent to Legba—and may never even have heard of him—he still uses the descriptions of himself in punitive clothing for similar effect. Examples of this include burlap clothes, plantation workers' clothes, and a henequen rope to bind his hands, all of which are provided for him after the discovery of his allegedly stolen coin. The punitive overtone of these items is evident first to Manzano, and later to the reader, since they motivate him to flee into another room in an attempt to escape his punishment (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 75). It underscores his goal of creating sympathy among readers.

A parallel in terms of power is less obvious, since Manzano lacked any consistent formal power, and his only tangible influence lay in his ability to win the favor of others, either through faithful service or unusual linguistic gifts. However, his goal to bring about positive change for himself and other slaves through the publication of his life story does suggest a type of empowerment. His humble, silent appearance, particularly when juxtaposed with both his aristocratic attire and his impressive oratorical skills, parallels

the trickster god's vacillation between humble and awe-inspiring forms. It also brings to mind his status as a go-between for both mortals and Yoruba orishas, not unlike Manzano's liminal status as an intermediary for the free and the enslaved. The ability to produce a multivalent text with the potential to communicate two ostensibly contrasting ideas—weakness and power—is a key piece of evidence in support of Manzano's agency. Thus, the negation of the residual in terms of the trappings of white metropolitan culture may, somewhat ironically, facilitate Manzano's future empowerment as an author.

The themes of the residual and its have several parallels in Yoruban thought, specifically in relation to the two meta-tropes *nkisi* and *simbi*. *Nkisi* is defined as a fetish in Yoruban thought; thus, if it is used in Manzano's case to refer to the accoutrements of white culture, it parallels the residual in its function either as a tool of cultural domination by whites or as one of voluntary cultural assimilation by Manzano. Piedra's esthetic definition of *nkisi*, as a relationship between the signifier and the signified, may be applied to the relationship between the intention of whites who impose or withhold residual aspects of their culture on Manzano and Manzano's emulation and interpretation of these residual aspects. While the whites in question here may view the imposition of their will on Manzano as a form of cultural hegemony that reinforces the unequal binary relationship between metropolitans and subalterns, Manzano views it as a means of eliminating such a distinction through the assimilation of white culture. The association of *nkisi* with the trope of metonymy is also relevant here. Since any residual aspect of white culture that is imposed on or sought after by Manzano—clothing, food, oral dialect, literacy, writing style—represents the broader white culture, it constitutes an example of metonymy as a part that represents the whole.

Simbi is defined by the Yoruba as a negative but active link between the individual and tradition and an omen that traditional relationships are being challenged. Piedra's interpretation of *simbi* as a challenger of signification, which reverses the relationship between signifier and signified, essentially echoes this view (Piedra, *Monkey* 374-75). The interpretation of *simbi* as a trope analogous to irony is also relevant. Like *simbi*, irony is negational in terms of its influence on the meaning of both words and relationships. *Nkisi* and *simbi* both constitute relationships between signifier and signified, but each one represents a different orientation of the relationship. *Nkisi* may account for Manzano's (mis)interpretation of the imposition of white culture as a signified that is different from the intended signifier. Yet *simbi* carries this change a step further, by allowing Manzano to not merely misinterpret a relationship imposed upon himself by whites but to reverse it. To a certain degree, one may find evidence of this reversal in the novel in the filial relationship which he enjoys to varying degrees with different owners and which, at least in some cases, grants him preferable living conditions and more numerous opportunities for (white) cultural assimilation in comparison to most slaves. Chief among these opportunities is his acquisition of writing skill. On the most fundamental level, the transition from oral emulation to reading, and ultimately, to writing shifts Manzano's role in the communicative process from a recipient to an emitter, and thus reverses the direction of signification. Also, since the most noteworthy examples of Manzano's oral production alluded to in the novel—such as his recitation of sermons, plays, and other literature—rely almost entirely on mimicry, the mastery of writing elevates the level of his discursive skill from mere memorization and comprehension to higher order skills such as application and synthesis. Beyond this,

Manzano's fame eventually reaches the point that his writing is sought after by some as a model to be emulated (Burton, *Ambivalence* 2). The recitative performances which Manzano gave as a child serve as a precursor to this phenomenon since they are examples of Manzano's linguistic production being sought after by white audiences. However, these childhood performances do not constitute a reversal of the direction of signification to the same extent as his later written publications—if they constitute a reversal at all—since they were essentially reproductions of oral discourse created by whites. His written publications, in spite of criticism that they rely too heavily on neo-classical stylistic traits, are creative acts that show evidence of his agency in their own right.

2.4 Manzano's Role as Messenger

Another topic related to the residual, at least on a figurative level, is Manzano's potential function as a messenger. In any communicative exchange, the signified contains a residual of the signifier. Since the signifier and signified are rarely, if ever, identical, there is an inherent question regarding the quantity and quality of the residual found in the latter, or to put it another way, regarding the fidelity of text's meaning as it is interpreted by a recipient. Both the creator of a text and its recipient may influence the purity of communication. Yet, more important than either of these is the role of the messenger, since, in his function as a mediator, he is afforded the opportunity not only to disseminate a message, but also to impede its transmission via revision, addition, or deletion. This relates to the criticism that the Del Monte tertulia altered Manzano's autobiography to the point that the majority of it was no longer his own work. It also relates to Manzano's own alterations in the process of signifying about his experience.

Some examples of this are evident in his conscious choice of experiences and periods of life to include or omit in his written account—a practice that he refers to in the narrative on multiple occasions. Other examples occur within his narration of specific events and illustrate how he attempts to exploit his revisionary capacity via oral communication to resolve dilemmas in real life. His acknowledgement of both types of revision lends his autobiography a meta-fictional quality. The discussion of stories told by Manzano within the context of his narrative will focus on the revision of his oral communication to illustrate how he uses his role as a discursive go-between both to resolve immediate dilemmas in his life and, on a more subtle level, to reverse relationships of power while outwardly adhering to the status quo. They should also demonstrate his simultaneous realization of the Yoruba meta-tropes *nkisi* and *simbi*, which correspond with the Western master tropes of metonymy and irony respectively. In a further parallel with the Yoruba culture, one may observe that his communicative choices parallel the pattern of a practitioner's random selection of a sign to invoke an Odu, a Babalawo's selection of verses from the chosen Odu, and a Babalawo's interpretation of these verses.

While Manzano's principle task was not that of a messenger, he was occasionally assigned this role by his owners. One such case involved relaying information about the purchase of chickens and capons. Even when fulfilling other duties, he was still able to eavesdrop and share what he had heard. In addition to sharing information, Manzano was able to revise or withhold it, which on certain occasions, he did. Several examples of this can be seen in the episode of the missing capon. During his beating and interrogation, Manzano makes up stories about having sold the capon and having spent the money he received (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 97). After the muleteer, Dionisio Covadonga,

intercedes on Manzano's behalf by telling the real reason for the capon's disappearance, both Manzano and another mulatta named Simona are afforded another chance to revise their story. In the following quotation, one finds examples of the withholding of information by Dionisio, Simona and Manzano:

The mulatta, Simona, was called and questioned. She declared everything to be true. The overseer asked why they had not said anything before. Dionisio said that nobody knew because all that one heard was talk about some capon or other, but nobody knew which capon, and if I had not told Simona and Dionisio which was the capon in question, nobody would have understood (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 99).

By sharing a story that had been heretofore untold, Dionisio functions both as an advocate of Manzano and as a messenger. His validation is required, not for Manzano's story—since none of Manzano's numerous, fabricated stories is retold here, but for his innocence. Validation of Dionisio's story is then sought by the overseer, but not from a person of higher rank, as one might expect. Instead, it is sought from Simona, who, if not a slave, still occupies an inferior and subservient position. By confirming the truth of Dionisio's story, Simona demonstrates her own agency on two levels. In an obvious sense, she validates his story. By indicating that she possesses knowledge of the events in the story—a knowledge that she chooses not to share—she also reflects her own capacity as a messenger who possesses the free will to communicate or withhold information. Manzano, in turn, does not appear to have been questioned at this stage; yet his own validation of Simona's statement is still necessary in order to fully absolve him in the mind of the reader. Manzano does this by clarifying to her the capon in question and by disclosing this illocutionary act to the readers via his narrative.

One noteworthy aspect of this sequence is that each stage of validation is sought by a person of higher social status and fulfilled by an inferior. It proceeds in descending

order of social hierarchy from the overseer, to Dionisio, to Simona, to Manzano. To the extent that those of higher status depend on those of lower status for the validation of their accounts based on their relative proximity to the source of eyewitness testimony—Manzano, the traditional hierarchy may appear to be reversed. It is also reminiscent of the reversal of the relationship between signifier and signified implicit in comparisons of *nkisi* and *simbi*. In this context, the overseer would constitute the initial *nkisi*, followed by the diminished *nkisis* of Dionisio and Simona. While the testimonies of Dionisio and Simona are forms of *nkisi*, they are simultaneously transitioning to *simbi*—a process that culminates with Manzano's testimony. This process is also reminiscent of the monkey figure Coco Macaco, whose tendency is to ironically neutralize the attempt to fix a message from its original source (Piedra, *Monkey* 376).

However, since *simbi* is not merely a reversal of *nkisi*, but a challenger of signification in its own right with trickster-like connotations, one may assume that this process is not a clean-cut reversal of agency leading to Manzano's empowerment. An ostensible reversal of this sort may mask a more subtle truth that people of lower status felt obligated to validate the claims of their socioeconomic superiors even when momentarily granted a semiotic advantage. As Frisch points out, the meaning of a witness's testimony is intersubjective in that it is based on relations between different people and, to an extent, may anticipate the expectations of the audience (Frisch 32). When Frisch's idea is applied to this portion of the narrative, it may lead one to assume that Manzano's testimony was given under pressure to corroborate the overseer's claim—a scenario which, if true, would not be unlike his earlier interrogations in which his captors attempted to beat him into confessing that which they wished to hear. Given that

Manzano's testimony to Simona was provided prior to the questioning by the overseer, it is further removed both temporally and semiotically from the overseer. Yet Frisch's idea may still be applicable here if Manzano was motivated by his anticipation of the overseer's expectations.

Regardless of the timing of the testimonies and the validation that they provide, each one illustrates agency on the part of an inferior in an unequal relationship. In a meta-critical sense, this is reminiscent of the endless breakdown of any metonym into another metonym and a metaphor. In such a classification, metonymy would constitute the lesser entity, and metaphor the greater one. Metonymy would also constitute the part that represents the whole, as well as the signifier that represents the signified. This is because the word or concept fulfilling the role of the part or signifier is a known entity and thus, will subconsciously be perceived as a stereotypical representative of either most or all entities of the same type. Even in its representation of that part—to say nothing of its representation of the greater whole—it already carries out a metonymic function.

The whole, which is represented by the part and constitutes the signified in a relationship, is analogous to metaphor. One reason for this is that the word or concept fulfilling the role of the whole or signified is not a known entity at the moment in which the signifier is read or heard. A whole could be anything for which the aforementioned part could form a logical component in a physical, social, intellectual, or otherwise tangible or intangible sense. In like manner, a signified may be anything that the creator of the trope intends it to be. While each of the four master tropes—and by extension, any trope—consists of a dyadic relationship between signifier and signified, metonymy is probably the trope whose signified is most restricted in its meaning. This is due to

metonymy's association with the tangible relationship between a part and a whole, as well as metonymy's reductionist tendency (White, *Metahistory* 35). Synecdoche, which uses a part to represent the essence of the whole, would be somewhat less restrictive regarding the meaning of its signified. This is partly because essences are less tangible than objects themselves, and tend to be more subjective. Metaphor, which expresses meaning in terms of equivalence or identity that simultaneously involves both similarity and difference (White, *Tropics* 72) and irony, which is negational and tends to function largely against the expectations of common knowledge and verbal expression (White, *Metahistory* 32), would both be significantly less restrictive regarding the meaning of their signifieds than either metonymy or synecdoche. Thus, of the two tropes present in the subdivision of a metonym—a metaphor and another metonym, metaphor would possess greater freedom of signification and would constitute the superior trope. Metonymy, due to the more restricted nature of its signifying potential, would be the inferior trope. Furthermore, metonymy is commonly considered the least reversible of the four master tropes due to its syntagmatic nature and its focus on contiguous, external aspects of language. This aspect of metonymy parallels the earlier-mentioned issue of the reversibility of agency from the overseer to Manzano regarding the validation of the former's testimony. If the overseer's testimony is treated as a *nkisi*—a relationship between signifier and signified, then in Yoruba semiotics, its reversal is conceivable in the form of *simbi*. However, if the overseer's testimony is treated as a metonym—a combination of a metaphor and another metonym, then its reversal is less conceivable. This disparity between the Yoruba and Western semiotic systems brings to mind the

trickster-like, ironic connotation of *simbi* and raises the question of whether its reversal of *nkisi* is authentic or, like the reversal of a metonym, possible only in terms of appearance.

This interpretation of the ontological nature of metonymy may be applied to the manifestations of Yoruba cosmology in Cuban slave society, and to Manzano's status as a slave in relation to his masters. On many Cuban plantations, slaves would carry out hexes, which were also referred to as *nkisi*. A central component of these hexes is dirt that metonymically represents slaves' dead ancestors by containing a portion of their remains. Although the dead are activated to a degree via the hex, they are not the agents/authors who begin the process of signification. This role is fulfilled by the slaves. The dead, along with whatever other ingredients are mixed with them, constitute the signifier. While the dead are active through their ability to influence the signified, their activity is dependent on slaves who summon them via the hex. Thus, their signifying potential is limited, as in the case of the trope of metonymy. This same idea may be seen in the Yoruba portrayal of *nkisi*, of which the hex is but one type. In the Yoruba belief system, a *nkisi*, while fabricated by humans, is recognized as a living entity in possession of its own free will (Young 113-14). The hex's effect on an intended recipient parallels the signified in that it is an outgrowth of the signifier, it is oriented to a future goal, and its effect is not entirely predetermined. Since the hex's effect will be felt more profoundly and remembered longer than the hex itself, it corresponds with metaphor, which constitutes the superior component in the part-whole subdivision of metonymy.

The signifier-signified relationship between the dead and the living in a Yoruba *nkisi* also parallels the relationship between Manzano and the free people with whom he interacts. This is true in the case of his owners, since Manzano's labor in the role as a

signifier ultimately yields a financial profit—or a signified—for them. It is also true in the case of Manzano's literary collaborators in the Del Monte Tertulia, in which case, Manzano's original text is the signifier and the tertulia's revision of it, although ultimately a signifier in its own right, is based on a signified—the tertulia's interpretation Manzano's original. A further parallel may be drawn in the relationship between Manzano and the overseer of El Molino, whose announcement of Manzano's innocence regarding the missing capon leads to the termination of the latter's suffering. Just as the realization of a hex on a living person depends on the intervention of the dead, the validation of the overseer's statement regarding Manzano's innocence depends on the intervention of Manzano himself. One may further note the living-dead binary in the second scenario by observing that the overseer—a free person who was the most socioeconomically alive of the four people in question—himself, Dionisio, Simona, and Manzano—depends on a chain of validating agents (or signifiers) concluding with the enslaved Manzano, who, at least in a figurative sense, was the most dead. The symbolic association of slavery with death is not lost on Manzano, who states in a written response to Del Monte's request for his autobiography, "Remember, your grace, when you read it that I am a slave and that a slave is a dead soul before his master" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 21). While the overseer in this scenario is not Manzano's owner, he still possesses authority insofar as Manzano is considered an extension of his will, due to the latter's obligation to fulfill his commands. Thus, if the relation between Manzano and the overseer is expressed as a metonym, Manzano constitutes a part—or secondary metonym—which, is juxtaposed within the primary metonym with the overseer's whole—or metaphor. Since, in historical and literary contexts, metaphor characterizes the domain of person's experience and reflects

her or his significance in terms of identity, it is logical that the overseer be portrayed not merely in his own right but also in terms of his unequal power relationship with Manzano (White, *Tropics* 5, 72). In an interesting Yoruba parallel, the overseer's verbal account of the incident with the capon may be expressed as a *nkisi* (fetish or hex) that draws both from the *ndoki* (spellcaster) and the remnants of previously fabricated *nkisi* including the stories of Dionisio, Simona, and Manzano. In the Yoruba-based interpretation, as in the Western-based one, the meaning of the textual *nkisi* is partially derived from earlier texts, reminiscent of the infinite subdivision of a metonym. Further, in each subdivision, the overseer in the role of *ndoki* is the dominant entity in the interaction with his validating texts, much like a metaphor in relation to a metonym.

The theme of the residual—and likewise the theme of metonymy as a part representing a whole—also relates to the transition of Manzano's autobiography from a private to a public story. In this case, however, the residual is derived not only from Manzano's own writing but also from the tradition in whose emulation his account is reshaped. Madden's rearrangement of events and his omission of numerous personal details from Manzano's account facilitates its incorporation into the broader history which is being formed. Through these types of changes, what begins as the story of an individual may be transformed metonymically into the story of an emerging country (Molloy, *Face* 82). While there is a certain residual effect here based on Manzano's original, it is diminished in favor of other influences intended to facilitate the story's acceptance by a broader Cuban audience. To a certain extent, Manzano is complicit in this process, since it corresponds with his goal of writing a truly Cuban novel after acquiring his freedom. While neither the dates of Manzano's life, his manumission, nor

the publication of his autobiography correspond with symbolic dates in the history of Cuba, his authorial ambition shows an awareness of the potential to initiate and, thus, become part of a larger trend. Del Monte's desire to use Manzano's autobiography for this same purpose prior to the latter's manumission exhibits a similar awareness, albeit from a more exploitative perspective. In their inclusion, omission, and arrangement of details, Manzano, Del Monte and Madden demonstrate further discursive insight, since, in order to achieve their somewhat varied communicative aims, they all prioritize of "the mold" of writing over the truthfulness of the content. In doing so, they follow a trend in Latin American writing that dates back to the work of Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (Camacho, *Meta-historia* 38). They also enhance the residual influence of Latin American storytelling trends which counters the influence of Manzano's own writing.

The residual effect is reinforced not only in the writing strategies for unifying the text with a larger trend, but also in Manzano's own attempts to gain access to various aspects of the white mode of living. Manzano does this to improve his own quality of life by obtaining both figurative residuals of white culture such as literacy, art, and music, as well as more literal residuals such as leftover scraps of food. His desire for such residuals is augmented both by his mistreatment and by his physical isolation from other blacks. These contribute to his sense of disorientation, displacement, and racial ambivalence and increase his desire for a sense of self. Fulfillment of such a desire might be aided by familial association, personal space, or personal belongings, yet for Manzano none of these things is certain. He has no space of his own in the house, and is expected to be at the Marchioness de Prado Ameno's side or feet, when not performing some task. In effect, he is located at a threshold, which is a boundary marker between spaces rather

than a space in its own right (Molloy, *Serf* 409). His function at this threshold is to intercept undesirable contact for his mistress. Both in terms of location and function, Manzano is reminiscent of the Yoruba trickster god Legba or Eshu, who was thought to preside in a physical sense over crossroads and entrances, and in a discursive sense over the transfer of information from one party to another (Pemberton 20, 22). Yet unfortunately for Manzano, his own influence over the threshold is limited since it is presided over by his owner.

The only place where Manzano can escape his mistress' control is the lavatory—a fact never addressed by Madden. Just as he scavenged the left-over food from his owners' table, secretly, furtively and aware of the punishment that could result if he were caught overindulging or suffering the consequent digestive ailments, he surreptitiously sought out artistic and linguistic models to imitate by gathering cast off drawings from the art lessons of the Marchioness de Justiz and her children, and collecting scraps of paper with writing from the street (Molloy, *Serf* 410). In effect, he utilizes other people's waste for his own benefit, thus endowing it with value and new meaning. It is interesting to note that Manzano's behavior in both contexts is reminiscent of carrion eaters—one of the two types of animals with which the trickster figure is most commonly associated (Carroll, *Perspective* 310). The tendency to appropriate others' waste emphasizes the notion of the residual and the value that Manzano places on it (Molloy, *Serf* 411). In each of these contexts, Manzano occupies a liminal space in order to acquire residuals, be they food, reading material, cast-aside artwork or clothing. In some cases, they are given to him directly, yet in other cases, he must make the effort himself. In many cases, his location at the moments of acquiring the residual—beside the table, walking where others

have already passed on the street, sitting in the corner of the room during the art class—are symbolic of his inferior, yet liminal status. The one key location where Manzano partakes of a residual but does not directly acquire it is the lavatory. In this sense, the lavatory is not a threshold or liminal space through which Manzano carries out the task of residual acquisition. However, it is unique as a location that provides him with the privacy and security to consume what he has acquired elsewhere. The lavatory is similar to other places of residual consumption—such as the corner of the art class or a master’s study in the absence of the master—in that the privacy facilitates Manzano’s acquisition of things that are prohibited. While the rules regarding Manzano’s acquisition of some residuals, such as drawings from art class, are not as strict, in most cases they are intended to maintain a type of status quo—a division between slave and free. Put another way, each residual functions as a signifier of waste discarded by members of the aristocracy, and by extension, of the aristocracy itself. In this sense, the residuals function as thresholds in their own right, over which Manzano is not to acquire control, lest he blur the distinction which they serve to create or reinforce. In cases where Manzano’s attempts to acquire or consume residuals are witnessed by whites, he is usually discouraged or punished. Yet in many cases, often in private, he succeeds in acquiring the residuals and utilizing them in a manner contrary to their creators’ intentions. In each case, he effectively acquires an object of fetish—or *nkisi*, which is also defined as a relationship between a signifier and a signified—and then reverses this relationship according to his own volition. By doing this, Manzano not only fulfills the definition of *simbi*—the reversal of the signifier-signified relationship inherent in *nkisi*—but also demonstrates his own agency.

Manzano's dependency on the residual is particularly evident in his poems. He acknowledges their lack originality by referring to them as "cold imitations" in his autobiography (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 127; Molloy, *Serf* 415). His poetic language, even when written from a first-person perspective, emulates the voice and conventions of his masters. Examples of this include his appropriation of the Roman-sounding names *Delia* and *Lesbia* to refer to his two wives, and his description of his brother as a "robust Ethiopian," utilizing the same commonplace euphemism for blacks that would later be used on him by Del Monte. They are also evident in his overuse of vocabulary from classical poetry, his fondness for certain rhetorical tropes, and his frequent classical references (Molloy, *Serf* 415). Due to these stylistic traits, Manzano's poetry has been described as being "cliche-ridden" and showing "near total submission to previous texts" (Shumway 377). While Francisco Calcagno, another member of Del Monte's tertulia, identified Manzano's stylistic devices as marks of "genius," they are more likely the result his mimicry (Molloy, *Serf* 415). What makes Manzano's fixation on the discursive residual even more ironic is that is based on models which do not correspond with his own identity as a black and a slave. Lacking a founding fiction that matches his own enslaved experience, his only option is to use models written by free whites. Manzano's ethnic difference from these authors may grant him a degree of freedom from the parameters of a borrowed genre, similar how Victoria Ocampo's gender facilitated her transcendence of literary boundaries established by males in the writing of her own autobiography. However, these models cannot provide him with a sense of self (417).

By viewing this aspect of Manzano's writing in terms of Yoruba tropes, one may see that it echoes the trend of his transformation of the more tangible residuals acquired

in the house or on the street. As in the instances of food scraps, reading samples, and artwork, with literature Manzano takes an entity that has been assigned one sub-textual meaning by whites and endows it with a new sub-textual meaning based on his own interpretation. Aristocratic whites, albeit sometimes unconsciously, utilized literature to reiterate their superiority over illiterate people—a group which subsumed the vast majority of blacks as well as many whites. The literature which they wrote and consumed served as a boundary marker between themselves and others, most notably blacks. That the reinforcement of this division was largely intentional rather than coincidental is confirmed by laws which forbade the teaching of reading and writing to blacks. Manzano, however, appropriates texts which were meant to be denied him, and exploits them for the purpose of transcending the very boundary which they were intended to reinforce. His transformation of them not only changes their signified, but reverses the relationship between it and the signifier, thus fulfilling Piedra's esthetic interpretation of the Yoruba trope *simbi*. Since Manzano's literary output and the financial rewards of his authorship were severely limited after his emancipation, and most of his employment was in areas not requiring literacy, some may question the lasting benefit of his literacy. Nevertheless, the fame that he achieved as a slave author and his posthumous recognition as a literary entrepreneur both reflect a degree of his success as a writer of African-descent in acquiring a voice and having it heard—and sometimes celebrated—by predominantly white audiences. To highlight another parallel with the Yoruba tradition, Manzano's liminality is reminiscent of Legba, who uses deception to transcend thresholds.

2.5 Ambivalence

Liminality, particularly when involving ethnic identity as in Manzano's case, brings to mind the related topic of ambivalence regarding the sense of self—a factor that plagued both Manzano and Madden, and caused Madden, an Irishman, to empathize with slaves. Historically, the Irish were viewed as racially inferior "Others" to the English colonial masters and subjected to oppression under British colonialism (Burton, *Ambivalence* 4). One effort to give the English prejudice against the Irish a quasi-scientific legitimacy by distinguishing the two groups in tangible terms of race rather than mere cultural nuances was the 'Index of Nigrescence,' compiled in 1885 by John Bedloe, president of the Anthropological Institute of England. This document, which served largely to elevate the image of white Anglo-Saxons above that of the Irish, described natives of the western part of Ireland as having "'Africanoid' jutting jaws and 'long slitting nostrils'" (46). It appropriated two stereotypical bases of the better known anti-African prejudice and applied them to the lesser known anti-Irish prejudice. In doing so, it sought to shape the identity of an entire people on the basis of difference, a strategy often used by imperialists or others in positions of power (41). In spite of these divisions, both Manzano and Madden were categorized as "in-between persons" who fit outside of the black/white or Irish/English binaries. This was partly because they were isolated from counterparts in their youth and had comparatively privileged treatments (47). In both cases, as in the case of many colonized people, the construction of identity was complicated by a notion of ambivalence (41). While Manzano's contact with other

blacks—both slave and free—is minimized, it undoubtedly shapes his cultural perspective and personal identity (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 55). Since, as one author puts it, "any mediator has to retain something of both sides of that duality that he mediates" (Koepping 198-99), it is understandable that Manzano's contact with people of different social echelons and different worldviews may influence his ambivalent sense of self.

A person's ambivalence regarding the sense of self may be influenced through the actions of other people or through one's own actions, both of which are evident in Manzano's case. Examples of the passive formation of his ambivalence are evident with both of his female owners, but particularly the Marchioness de Prado Ameno, who, by restricting his interaction with other blacks, tried to prevent him from building solidarity with them. This process, which Moreno Friginals refers to as "deculturalization," is used to prevent social cohesion and a sense of identity. Since it served to avert unrest and subversive activities that were facilitated by potential alliances, it was a useful tactic for slave owners anxious about the possibility of a revolt (Burton, *Ambivalence* 56).

In regard to the active shaping of an ambivalent identity, the use of guile or trickery as a survival mechanism creates a split identity, or double alienation, in which the colonized seems out of place in both the hegemonic and subaltern cultural contexts. Madden himself is aware of this tendency and comments on it in his memoirs: "The vices of slavery, that are its peculiar ones, its only weapons of defense, are servile sycophancy and proneness to deceive" (qtd. in Burton, *Ambivalence* 55). Examples of Manzano's trickery focus largely on the acquisition of food and literacy—a basic survival need and a means of acquiring agency respectively. This tendency to deceive plays a key role in the formation of Manzano's identity and is evident in multiple manifestations. To a certain

extent, it is evident in his writing, which while categorized under fictional or creative genres—such as drama and poetry—and containing traces of creativity, is still largely mimetic and lacking in originality. Like a scavenger, Manzano appropriates elements from other literary works, primarily those of neo-classical authors such as Arriaza, and rearranges them in new works of his own. While his publications are not highly original, they demonstrate a certain editorial tendency, albeit imperfect and undeveloped. Put another way, in the composition of his so-called "creative" work, Manzano largely parallels the role traditionally associated with the editor. In this sense, he parallels to a certain degree the role of the Yoruba trickster Legba. Legba's chief responsibility in a semiotic context is that of interpretation—specifically the interpretation of the sayings of the Ifá oracle. In this respect, he differs from Manzano, who offers little in the way of explicit interpretation of other literary texts. However, Legba and Manzano are similar in that they both function as recipients and editors of other texts. Through the mode of interpretation, Legba effectively edits texts from other orishas for presentation to humans. Manzano, albeit unwittingly, edits texts from other, predominantly neo-classical, authors by incorporating their vocabulary, rhetorical tropes, and other stylistic devices into his own compositions. Occasionally, he even fulfills the role of critic by offering commentary on the texts or authors which precede him, as can be seen in his explicit acknowledgement of Arriaza as a role model (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 105, 127).

Aside from raising questions about the degree of Manzano's authorship and originality, the ambiguity between his role as author and editor/critic is significant in that it parallels the overlap of these concepts in the Yoruba cosmology. *Ndoki* is traditionally defined as a witch who creates fetishes to form a relationship between the known and

unknown and, in doing so, changes the natural order. *Nganga*, conversely, is defined as an expert who manipulates fetishes for the purpose of restoring the natural order (Piedra, *Monkey* 374). In this context, *ndoki* appears to correspond with the role of author in its function as the creator of a text. *Nganga* matches the role of editor or critic, since it manipulates a text that has already been created by someone else.

In his mythopoetic interpretation of these concepts, Piedra equates *ndoki* with both the artist's and the critic's domain, and makes no mention of *nganga* (Piedra, *Monkey* 375). In the Yoruba system, the functions of *ndoki* and *nganga* are distinct and, to an extent, diametrically opposed, since *nganga* reshapes the fetish created by *ndoki* with the aim of restoring the order that *ndoki* has altered. *Ndoki*'s goal of alteration carries an agonic connotation and, thus, stands in contrast to *nganga*'s goal of restoration, which in turn, connotes equilibrium. However, if one considers the result of *ndoki*'s fetish to constitute a new order, then *nganga*'s intervention may be seen as agonic rather than restorative. Piedra's reduction of the two functions to a single trope reflects the potentially indeterminate border between them. It also mirrors the view held by some rhetoricians that synecdoche constitutes a form of metaphor. This association is due partly to metaphor's and synecdoche's shared use of integrational language (White, *Metahistory* 32). It is also due to a similarity between metaphor's tendency to represent the domain of experience and synecdoche's tendency to represent an entity's essence (White, *Tropics* 5). Both of these tropes represent the concepts in question as single, unified entities, in contrast to metonymic and ironic discourses which tend to represent concepts reductively in terms of relationships between even smaller entities or qualities (White, *Metahistory* 32; White, *Tropics* 5).

Interestingly, this indeterminate border is exemplified by Manzano's own writing. In keeping with the traditional function of *ndoki* of creating a fetish and altering the natural order, Manzano attempted to write himself into being in a manner unprecedented in Spanish by a slave of African descent. His white collaborators were less concerned with altering the natural order constituted by the Cuban slave society than in exploiting his role as a fetish to facilitate their other political objectives. Manzano succeeds in fulfilling both of these functions. However, in his attempt to bring about change, he also does certain things that suggest a return to the pre-existing order. Two examples of this are his obsessive emulation of the neo-classical writing style and his conscious dependence on Del Monte for advice. Manzano is conscious of both habits, as can be seen by his acknowledgement of them in *Autobiografía* and in his personal correspondence with Del Monte. What he may not be aware of is their counterintuitive relation to his grander authorial goals.

2.6 Interpolated Stories within the Broader Narrative

The presence of interpolated stories is a key component of Manzano's narrative for several reasons. As stories within a story that are accompanied by Manzano's own meta-critical commentary, they enhance the metafictional quality of the text and reflect its narrator's heightened degree of self-awareness. Further, the concoction of such stories to escape punishment provide further evidence of Manzano's role as a trickster. One example of this involves the disappearance of a coin of King Fernando VII of Spain and Manzano's varying depictions of the event. The first version of this story begins with an explanation of why he received the coin: "it was when the coins bearing the likeness of

our Catholic monarch, Don Fernando VII, began to be minted, that a beggar came around for alms. For him, my mistress gave me one of the recently issued pesetas, so new that it seemed just minted." In the following paragraph, Manzano continues this story: "The night before, Don Nicolás had given me a peseta that I had in my pocket. I said to myself, this one is worth as much as the other and, switching them, I proceeded to give the beggar his alms" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 73). Afterwards, when Manzano drops a coin on the floor while playing with it and the Marchioness recognizes it as the one she gave him, she has him punished on grounds of theft. This event and its aftermath, aside from reflecting the cruel punishments carried out against slaves, are significant on semiotic grounds because of their reflection of multiple versions of the same event. The initial version—and the only one explicitly presented in its entirety—is told by Manzano as a straightforward event in the plot (73-75). However, the reader is led to suspect that there is another version of the story by the statement that the Marchioness "sat down and wrote something" (75).

While the content of the Marchioness' letter is never explicitly revealed, there are further reasons to speculate that it concerns Manzano's punishment as a consequence of his possession of the peseta. One is the arrival of a black muleteer with henequen rope to bind Manzano's hands and plantation workers' clothes for Manzano to wear during his sentence, both of which the latter recognizes as signs of punishment. Another is Manzano's subsequent discovery—after fleeing the room to escape the muleteer—of the marquis, Don Nicolás, writing to his sugar mill. As with the Marchioness' letter, the specific content of Don Nicolás' writing is never disclosed. However, the marquis' reception of at least two forms of the story is apparent in Manzano's description of their

initial interaction: "I threw myself at his feet, and upon seeing me he asked me what was going on. I told him and he said to me, 'Scoundrel! Why did you steal the peseta from your mistress?' 'I did not, sir,' I replied. 'The master gave it to me.' 'When?' he asked. 'Last night,' I answered" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 75-77). The first version presented to Don Nicolás in this conversation is Manzano's relation of the accusation against himself. However, the reader learns of it second-hand—not from Manzano's initial telling, but from Don Nicolás' response. In effect, it is a processed version that does not consider Manzano's perspective regarding the accusation's veracity. On the contrary, the accusatory follow-up question of the listener, Don Nicolás, suggests that he interprets the story told by his wife—the Marchioness—to be accurate.

At this point, a second, much truncated, version of the story is presented via Manzano's concise responses to Don Nicolás' questions, which contradicts the first version—allegedly originating from the Marchioness. However, the second version—Manzano's—is denied by the master in a single word, "No" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 77), and the verdict of Manzano's guilt is effectively settled. The identity of the master remains unclear. Don Nicolás' decision to question him may be based on his misinterpretation of Manzano's use of the word "master." The night before receiving a coin from the Marchioness for the purpose of alms to a beggar, Manzano had been given a similar one by Don Nicolás with no designated purpose. Since Manzano considered the two coins to be of equal value, he switched them and gave the beggar the coin from Don Nicolás, keeping the other for himself. Thus, his use of the word "master" in response to Don Nicolás' interrogation about the origin of the remaining coin was probably intended to refer to Don Nicolás himself. Manzano's decision to refer to Don Nicolás in the third

person even while addressing him directly was likely a form of respect that served to reiterate their hierarchical distance. However, its ambiguity regarding the master in question is probably what leads Don Nicolás to question the other "master" in another part of the house. Since the word "master" is used indiscriminately in Manzano's narrative to refer to almost all white males, including children, its function as a term of respect is standardized and its referent in this case is unclear. However, given Don Nicolás' recent involvement in the exchange of coins, one would expect him not only to remember this, but to use this memory to correctly interpret Manzano's ambiguity when others could not do so.

Whether Don Nicolás' misinterpretation is due to absentmindedness or vindictive prejudice remains unclear. However, Manzano reflects on it immediately after the questioning of the other master by Don Nicolás: "The truth is that my confusion did not allow me to tell a coherent story in order to explain such an obvious incident" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 77). This comment is significant for several reasons. First, it demonstrates Manzano's awareness of different versions of the event in question, their factual contradictions, the potential for one version to be favored over another on the basis of its teller's race, and the ambiguity of certain words whose clarification could restore both Manzano's credibility as a storyteller and his good favor as a trusted slave. Second, it is an example of diegetic discourse immersed in a largely mimetic framework. Although it is not distinguished from the narrative in any explicit manner, it constitutes a commentary on the narrative and as such, approaches the level of meta-fiction. It illustrates Manzano's awareness of the inherent subjectivity of a story, and of the emitter's role in concealing such subjectivity in order to maximize the story's credibility. It also combines

the functions of author (or artist) and critic within the scope of a single narrative voice. Such an idea has already been suggested by Piedra's esthetic interpretation of the meta-trope *ndoki*. However, it may also be fair to say that, in Yoruba terms, Manzano's text incorporates components of both *ndoki*—one who creates a fetish—and *nganga*—an expert who alters the fetish for the purpose of restoring the natural order. In a narrow sense, the fetish may correspond with Manzano's story about the coin. Different versions of this story—created by the Marchioness, Don Nicolás, the master, and inadvertently Manzano himself, each in the role of *nganga*—would constitute alterations of the fetish/hex or *nkisi*. The three alterations offered by whites serve to restore the allegedly natural order of white superiority and black inferiority by portraying Manzano as a habitual troublemaker. Manzano's alteration explicitly defends his own innocence and thus goes against the natural order in which slaves were assumed to be guilty and were not normally expected to contradict their masters. However, the manner in which his alteration is voiced—submissively and concisely—and the context in which it is presented—in response to an interrogation by Don Nicolás—do restore the natural order. In a broader sense, this *nkisi* may serve as a metaphor for the overall experience with the coin, since Manzano chooses the degree of detail to reveal about each version of the story that he shares with readers.

It is interesting that Manzano's metatextual role parallels his activity with the coin immediately before dropping it on the floor: "like a monkey, I was turning it over and over again, reading and rereading its inscriptions" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 73). It is uncertain whether or not Manzano perceived this parallel himself, and thus, the similarity may be purely coincidental. In any case, the coin would parallel the fetish or the story

that Manzano—and others—will ultimately present to Don Nicolás for his judgment. The multiple readings of its inscriptions could refer to Manzano's critical analysis of his accounts of the coin, as well as his speculation about how different versions will be interpreted and received, based on their adherence to or deviation from the status quo. The most obvious symbol would be the monkey, which, aside from being an epithet for blacks, is reminiscent of the sidekick of the Yoruba trickster figure. It also has parallels in the Signifyin(g) Monkey of African-American literature, the trickster Jigüe or Güije of Cuban folklore, and Coco Macaco of Yoruba lore. The last of these, Coco Macaco, corresponds closely with the meta-trope of *simbi* and the master trope of irony.

The narrative refers to several other cases of alleged theft by Manzano, which are relevant to the trickster figure for two main reasons: the similarity of Manzano's alleged behavior to that of a scavenger—a type of animal commonly used to represent the trickster, and the varying manners in which the events are retold. In one instance, Manzano picks up the small leaf of a geranium, left over from the gardener's transplanting activities. He inadvertently shreds the leaf, and when his mistress discovers it, he is punished by having his nose broken and being sent to the stocks. There are multiple elements in the narration of this event, which relate to the trickster and relevant topics in Yoruba cosmology and semiotics, as evident in the passage below:

Unaware of what I was doing, I held that extremely fragrant plant in my hand. Distracted by the verses consigned to my memory, I was walking two or three steps behind my mistress. Unconscious of what I was doing, I tore the leaf to shreds, which produced an even stronger aroma. As she entered one of the anterooms, my mistress drew back, for what reason I do not know. I stepped aside, but upon coming face to face with me she noticed the fragrance. Suddenly angered, she asked me in a sharp, upset tone of voice, "What do you have in your hands?" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 91)

Manzano's appropriation of the leaf is a subtle reminder of the association between the trickster figure and scavengers, a common trend found in most folkloric traditions where the trickster figure exists. On a figurative level, Manzano's scavenging of leaves discarded by other gardeners parallels his emulation of the language and stylistic traits of neo-classical poets, as well as his emulation of the speech, behavior, and dress of whites. The act of tearing up the leaf could signify a creative, discursive act on Manzano's part, since it parallels his borrowing and subsequent dismantling of other texts. While the initial fragrance of the leaf could signify the inherent poetic potential of all language, the stronger aroma resulting from the leaf's dismemberment could symbolize the superiority of restructuring and creativity over mere imitation. In Manzano's case, the heightened fragrance that results from his act could be a harbinger of his imminent increase in agency that may result from his future compositions. Perhaps his mistress' sharp rebuke—based primarily on information gleaned through her olfactory sense—strengthens this argument, since it could be a figurative representation of white opposition to black literacy, based on literacy's recognition as a tool of empowerment.

This fear, and its association with Manzano's creative potential as expressed through the medium of scent, is reiterated in the subsequent paragraph when the mistress takes a more active role in investigating the source of the smell: "She grabbed my hands, smelled them, and picked up the pieces, which became a pile, a bush, an outstanding audacity" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 91). Not only does the mistress demonstrate unusual physical proximity to Manzano by smelling his hands; she also intervenes directly in the destruction of his new, if accidental, creation. Manzano's discarding of the leaf segments lacked any obvious system and, as far as one can tell, had the leaf's dismemberment as its

ultimate goal. In spite of this, Manzano's act resulted in the reassembling of the leaf in a new form that, according to his own description, is revived. While the smell of the leaf stokes the mistress' curiosity, her viewing of the pile motivates her physical intervention in an attempt to re-appropriate and destroy it. In effect, both Manzano and his mistress, in turn, constitute agents who manipulate the fetish of the leaf to restore the natural order. In doing so, they both correspond with the Yoruba trope of *nganga*. Manzano does this by jettisoning the unwanted pieces of leaf once they no longer interest him. The mistress, on the other hand, attempts to confiscate Manzano's source of amusement, perhaps based on the fear that it will encourage him to possess and destroy other things, and by extension, the status quo. In regard to the Western trope of synecdoche, which is analogous to *nganga*, the pieces of the leaf illustrate a part-whole relationship, since they are still recognizable as parts of a whole, even in their pile. Synecdoche and metonymy are both based on a relationship between a part and its corresponding whole; yet synecdoche emphasizes intrinsic qualities while metonymy focuses on extrinsic ones (White, *Metahistory* 36). Thus torn fragments of the leaf and their unnatural arrangement in a pile are overshadowed by the similarity of their content. They also illustrate a certain intrinsicity via their scent, which is strengthened rather than weakened as a result of their dismemberment.

Manzano's treatment of the geranium leaf may have additional connotations in both Yoruban and Western semiotics. In Yoruba thought, the leaf corresponds with the trope of *nkisi* since it functions as both a fetish and a hex for Manzano. It could also symbolize the relationship between the signifier and signified. While the torn segments of the leaf are never reattached, their separation is reminiscent of the manner in which

ingredients of *nkisi*, such as dirt containing the decomposed remains of ancestors, include parts that once pertained to a whole—a connotation echoed in the master trope of metonymy. Like metonymy, Manzano's action also involves displacement, decentering, and reduction (White, *Tropics* 6-12).

However, the pile of leaf fragments is also suggestive of the trope of synecdoche. One reason for this is its prioritization of the intrinsic aspects of content and essence over the extrinsic aspect of form. Another reason is the future-oriented connotation of the description. From "pieces" to "a pile" to "a bush" and, finally, to "an outstanding audacity" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 91), the leaf that Manzano has torn apart and momentarily cast from the view has been reunited and brought back into the spectacle both for him and for his audience. Further, through his use of hyperbole, the leaf appears to have increased by stages to something that greatly exceeds its original size. In the third and fourth stages of this progression—"a bush" and "an outstanding audacity" respectively—the leaf seems to have transitioned from its dead and mutilated condition to a rejuvenated natural condition and, finally, to something whose appearance is described solely in terms of the fearless emotion which it connotes on the part of its creator. Although the duration of time portrayed here may only be a few seconds, there is still a diachronic overtone, typical of the synecdochic narrative style (White, *Tropics* 73). In keeping with the comic mode of emplotment, which corresponds with synecdoche, the transformation of Manzano's pile suggests the appearance of new forces and conditions from processes which, at first, appear to involve changes merely in form rather than essence (White, *Metahistory* 11). Such an appearance is true for the first two stages of change executed by Manzano—from leaf to pieces, and from pieces to pile—since the

size and shape of the leaf change, but its color, content, and odor remain the same. Although this scene ultimately ends badly for Manzano, the description of the leaf's transformation may be a synecdochic representation of the transition from his enslaved suffering to his increased status, heightened sense of self, and freedom of expression as a free person. Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, it may symbolize the prevalence of life over death and hint at Manzano's potential—although never fully achieved—success as a writer. In keeping with synecdoche, this interpretation could show both Manzano's optimism regarding future improvement, as well as an awareness of the reversibility of his conditions, for better or for worse.

Nkisi's incorporation of dead ancestors allows it to function metonymically as a medium for communication between the dead and the living, an ability shared by the trickster god. This same function may be subtly associated with Manzano in the passage shortly after his apprehension by his mistress, in which a more formal aspect of his punishment is described. Here, he is sent to the stocks, located in a former infirmary, which had once housed sick men from both the plantation and the San Miguel sugar mill. At the time of Manzano's visit, it contained only the stocks and some cadavers, which were waiting to be buried. Such a change in function, while purely factual when interpreted in a literal sense, may take on new, ironic, meaning when juxtaposed with potential overtones of Afro-Caribbean traditions. The chamber that once served to resuscitate individuals and empower them for future tasks among the living, has now become a repository of the dead. In a pessimistic sense, Manzano's placement here among the cadavers may remind him of his status as a slave who is dead before his

master. In a more optimistic sense, it may suggest the potential for agency even among the dead, as explicitly referred to in two of the sentences in the quotation below:

There, forced to remain standing, frozen by the cold and with nothing to cover me, I was locked up. I was scarcely alone in that place when it seemed that all the dead were rising and wandering up and down the length of that room. A broken-down shutter banged incessantly out over the river or ditch, near a noisy torrent of water falling from a cliff. And each blow seemed to be a dead person who was entering through the window from the afterlife. (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 91)

All of the events described here may be attributed to natural causes, such as Manzano's fear in an unfamiliar setting, his proximity to corpses, and the reoccurrence of loud, frightening noises. When interpreted in a figurative sense, however, it may be associated with key aspects of Afro-Caribbean thought. The resurrection of the dead, while not explicitly mentioned in the discussion of the four meta-tropes, may be a device for expressing their passive activation at the hands of a *ndoki*. The image of dead people re-entering the physical realm from the afterlife is significant as well. It suggests that the dead may possess both agency and free will, an idea in keeping with the principle of *nkisi*. The ability of the dead to travel from the afterlife to the present constitutes a reversal of the normal trajectory of time—an act which, in Yoruba thought, may be realized either by the trickster orisha or by a human through the preparation of a *nkisi*. The window's role as a spiritual portal also parallels the function of the trickster orisha's cane as a passage between the physical and spiritual realms.

The races of these cadavers are never specified. However, in the event that they were all people of African descent, it is possible that Manzano's mention of them could serve to represent former slaves who, even during life, lacked a voice of their own, and were dependent on Manzano to tell the story of their experience. While Manzano's stated goal of writing a truly Cuban novel is somewhat ambiguous regarding its collective

representation of other blacks, it is widely agreed that his account provided a model for later anti-slavery narratives by white Cubans. One scholar, Richard Jackson, goes so far as to identify Manzano as the starting point for the search for black identity in Hispanic literature (Burton, *Ambivalence* 2). Given Manzano's intermediary status in terms of topic, genre, and possibly black self-expression, it may be fair to view him—at least on a symbolic level—as the manifestation of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. The signifier would be the collective desire among those enslaved to tell about their experience, and the signified would be the manner in which this experience is simultaneously interpreted and expressed by Manzano to a broader, predominantly white, audience. That said, Manzano would function as a type of *nkisi* for slaves in general, even if he lacked awareness of this role. Manzano's position as a go-between and its connection to the determination of meaning are reminiscent of the intersubjective point of view attributed to medieval witnesses and of the view that the meaning of their testimony was based on interpersonal relations rather than an individual subject (Frisch 32). They also reflect the dependence of Manzano's narrative on an audience in order to achieve significance (30-31).

Another interesting component of Manzano's experience in the stocks is the parallel that he draws between himself and Jesus: "From under the handkerchief that covered his mouth, in a husky voice, he ordered my hands to be tied. They were tied like Jesus Christ's" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 91). At first glance, this description may appear to tie into the Catholic tradition prevalent in Cuba, with no obvious relevance to Yoruba thought. However, the Yoruba and Kongolesé traditions in Africa, like the derivative Santería tradition in Cuba, were highly syncretistic in their incorporation of components

from other cultures. One example of this is the Kongolese perception of Jesus as "the highest nkisi" (Young 116). While only one parallel between Manzano and Jesus—the physical positioning on a device of punishment—is explicitly mentioned in *Autobiografía*, several parallels exist. Like Jesus' social status, Manzano's was an enigmatic one. In the case of Manzano's biological parents, one was a slave and one was free, a phenomenon whose parallel in Jesus' case is that one parent was confined to an earthly existence while the other was considered divine. Just as Jesus has a surrogate parent in Joseph, Manzano acquires surrogate parents via his owners. His two female owners go so far as to explicitly express their surrogate relationship with him. The limited authority of his biological parents parallels the limited authority of Jesus' earthly parent. Due to a connection with a higher social echelon in Manzano's case and a higher spiritual echelon in Jesus' case, both men enjoy certain privileges. Yet they suffer public humiliation and injury, and exhibit habitual self-abnegation and a hesitancy to defend themselves based on their unique understandings of the "natural order." When Manzano describes himself in the following manner, "Distracted by the verses consigned to my memory, I was walking two or three steps behind my mistress" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 91), he may be referring both to the immediate distraction of reciting poetry, and to his devoted adherence to outward appearances of submission while in the presence of whites. The verses to which he alludes may be a subtle reference to various details of the status quo, which even if unwritten, were expected to be known and obeyed. If so, then Manzano's broader act of memorization—including that of both literary and non-literary (or even non-linguistic) material—may be more fully interpreted as a form of assimilation. The irony of this is that not all types of cultural assimilation are conducive

to maintaining the status quo. Those which may empower the weak are more likely to yield a restructuring of society. This said, those aspects of assimilation that are most conducive to Manzano's upward mobility—literacy and literary creativity—are the ones most adamantly discouraged by whites.

On a metatextual level, certain components of *nkisi* are also evident in the comparison of Manzano and Jesus. Both figures may access information that their peers lack, and both strive to diffuse it to a broader public. Yet the transmission of their discourses is impeded by editorial intervention, translation, and marginally receptive audiences. In the application of the concept of *nkisi* to the Christian perception of Jesus, the latter constitutes a mixture of three cultures—Hebrew, Greek, and Roman—and two states—mortal and divine. Manzano, in turn, constitutes a mixture of at least two cultures—black subaltern through his status as a slave, and white metropolitan through his employment in the domestic service of Cuban aristocrats. He might also be said to constitute a mixture of both enslaved and free states, since one of his parents was free while the other was not. In a functional sense, both Manzano and Jesus may be perceived as *nkisis* due to their intermediary roles.

Just as certain episodes from Jesus' life were not narrated in the Bible, certain details from Manzano's life were omitted from *Autobiografía*. While the latter omission is due partly to editorial intervention by Domingo del Monte and Richard Robert Madden, it is also carried out to a certain degree by Manzano. Manzano also displays his awareness of these omissions by alluding to them in the narrative. While he acknowledges passing over details multiples times throughout the narrative, the following instance in particular is noteworthy due to the long span of time which it encapsulates:

"But let us jump from 1810, 1811, and 1812 to 1835 in the present, omitting a vast array of vicissitudes between those dates and choosing from them the harsh blows of fate that forced me to leave my paternal home or birthplace in order to experience the varied abysses in the world waiting to devour my inexpert and fragile youth" (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 89). The first three years mentioned are consecutive and refer to a period of Manzano's childhood about which substantial amount of detail is provided. The fourth year is over two decades later and, thus, clearly symbolizes a different stage of his life. Such a shift is in keeping with the portrayals of Jesus in the New Testament which, after describing the events preceding and immediately following his birth, shift the focus to his ministry during the final three years of his life, effectively producing a hiatus of almost three decades. One of the ironies of Manzano's text is that the shift suggested by this diegetic commentary does not correspond entirely with his mimetic narrative of experiences. Since the last year mentioned here, 1835, is not only symbolically associated with the present—since it is also the year in which the narrative was first published, but is also the year in which *Autobiografía* was first published, one would expect the subsequent narrative to focus on events at this time. Yet, in the paragraph immediately following this citation, Manzano establishes the date as 1810.

The very next episode in the narrative also centers on an alleged act of theft. In this case, Manzano received a group of three capons and two chickens at the sugar mill, and subsequently delivered both the receipt and the birds to the watchman (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 93). Several weeks later, when a capon was missing, Manzano was summoned to give an account. At first, he repeated the same numbers that he had originally narrated. However, the following morning, Manzano claims that his mistress

"told me to go to the overseer's house and tell him I do not remember what" (95). While the details of his mistress' message are not specified, it is likely that they were an alternative explanation to the one that Manzano had previously provided. Surprisingly, when Manzano delivers this message to the plantation overseer at the overseer's house and in the presence of his mistress, it is ignored. When he attempts to repeat it to the sugar mill overseer, however, he is silenced, bound with a rope, and forced to flee the house on foot while the overseer moves along behind him on horseback. After falling, being bitten and wounded by dogs, and having his right arm dislocated by the overseer who fled with him, he is returned to the sugar mill and placed in the stocks again. At this point, he is surrounded by the overseer, an assistant overseer, and five blacks who throw him to the ground, interrogate him and lash him in an attempt to force him to confess the theft of the missing capon. According to Manzano's own written report, his oral account before the plantation audience underwent several changes:

The asked me about the chicken or capon. I did not know what to say because I knew nothing about it. I suffered twenty-five lashes. I said a thousand different things because they were demanding I tell the truth and I did not know which truth they wanted. I thought that saying I had taken it would suffice and the whipping would stop, but then I would have to say what became of the money, so I found myself in another dilemma. I said that I had bought a hat. 'Where is the hat?' It was a lie. I said that I had bought shoes; there were none. I said so many things, over and over again, trying to see how to free myself from so much torture. (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 97)

In the next paragraph, Manzano exaggerates the extent of his creativity, exclaiming, "I suffered these torments for nine nights; I said nine thousand different things as they shouted at me, 'Tell the truth!' and whipped me" (97). Here, Manzano both comments on and exhibits anew his deliberate attempt to manipulate the truth. While innocent regarding the theft of the capon, he is guilty of fabrication on multiple levels. This is true

both regarding the missing bird and the money that was to have been received in its place. Regarding the capon, Manzano lies not only about the bird, but also about the number of times—either one thousand or nine thousand, depending on the version of his confession—that he had lied. Regarding the money, he presents two explanations of its disappearance—the purchase of a hat and, subsequently, the purchase of shoes, yet admits in the same sentence the absence of any evidence to support his claims.

To conclude his description of this event, he confesses to having carried out multiple narrations of multiple stories with the singular goal of ending his suffering. He also unknowingly synthesizes—and confesses to having carried out—the principal steps in the process of remembrance: remembering, narrating, editing. Loosely speaking, these three steps correspond with the esthetic meanings of the four Afro-Caribbean metaphors *ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga* and *simbi* respectively, with the last step—editing—subsuming both *nganga*, and *simbi*. By remembering his experience, Manzano (*ndoki*) forms a relationship between the known and unknown and in doing so creates a fetish (*nkisi*), which assumes a tangible form in his narration of the event to his tormentors. After observing their dissatisfaction with his account, Manzano attempts to revise his story (the fetish) in order to restore the natural order, in accordance with the concept of *nganga*. Yet he does so neither out of loyalty to his tormentors nor to the tradition that they represent. His goal is self-preservation and he attempts to achieve it using a strategy of deception. He uses his status as a boy incapable of reflection as an excuse for not behaving maturely. In his direct interaction with his textual interrogators, Manzano portrays himself as innocent, but in his metatextual retelling of these events to readers, he demonstrates a level of cunning and perspicacity which transcends both his age and his

stereotype as a slave. In doing so, he constitutes a negative link between the individual (himself) and tradition, in keeping with the role of *simbi*. Since *simbi* corresponds with the master trope of irony, it is thought to be superior to the other, preceding, tropes in terms of both rhetorical effectiveness and intellectual sophistication. It may indeed be a sign of Manzano's intellectual sophistication in that it shows his awareness of reversibility—specifically in regard to his judgment by other people, his discursive representation of events for which he is being judged, and his loss of rhetorical innocence. Yet this epiphany is not effective in freeing him from his predicament. Perhaps the greatest irony of this incident and of Manzano's retelling of it is that, in spite of the ongoing subjectification of his stories, they were already subjective at the outset. Apart from his initial plea of ignorance, which his tormentors reject, his stories are not based on his memory of the event, but on desperate fabrications used in place of memory to satisfy the needs of his audience.

2.7 Metatextual Commentary in Manzano's Writing

Manzano exhibits both textual and metatextual levels of awareness by commenting on the negative ramification of providing certain information. Immediately afterwards, he narrates the strategy which he utilized to resolve this dilemma, acknowledging what amounts to a protean experiment on the effectiveness of discourse. Since his immediate goal here is to achieve a form of liberation, it may be a metonymic representation of his broader goal of emancipation. Likewise, the description of his beating, interrogation, and his strategies for escape may serve as metonymic representations of his overall experience as a slave.

Manzano's claim that he does not know which truth his captors want is also metatextual since it suggests his awareness of different ways in which the concept of truth can be perceived or portrayed. By acknowledging the existence of different forms of truth, some of which may be preferable to others based on the interests of a particular audience, Manzano allows for the possibility that all truths are relative and, therefore, subjective. He further evidences this idea by demonstrating that his conscious creation and evaluation of them is based not on their authenticity, but on their effectiveness in ending his torment. Another more subtle, but perhaps more widespread, example of deception by Manzano involves his style of language. The vocabulary, grammar, and syntax used in his narrative are all relatively simple in a manner that would seem in keeping with the expectations of slave speech. More subtle, but perhaps more significant, is his repeated shift from narrative mimesis to commentative diegesis and back again.

The fact that this transition occurs almost imperceptibly—and sometimes within a single sentence—reflects Manzano's heightened awareness of the communicative process and the manner in which it may be used to facilitate agency by people on either side of the slave-free binary (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 97). His frequent commentary about his own language use and its success or failure to attain his goals may also be a reflection of heightened self-consciousness—a condition resulting from both the constant scrutiny given to him as a slave and his liminal status as a mulatto in frequent contact with whites. His mixture of mimesis and diegesis also gives rise to a new level of language—diataxis. While diataxis is considered superior to the two aforementioned styles on the basis of its linguistic complexity, its shifting perspective from narrative to commentary and from fiction to meta-fiction also tends to be more erratic, non unlike Manzano's general

behavior in the fear-inducing environment where the whims of his owners change without warning and his fate is never certain. This condition and the vigilant behavior that it motivates are common to many animals associated with the trickster such as the fox, the buzzard, the mongoose, the spider, and the *jicotea* or tortoise. Since most of these animals are also scavengers, they parallel Manzano's dependence on others for residual sustenance. One irony of the episode involving the capon is that Manzano himself is not the true scavenger. This role is fulfilled by the steward Don Manuel Pipa, who accidentally leaves the capon in the kitchen and later decides to eat it (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 97-99). Once this fact is communicated, Manzano's punishment ceases. However, the overseer's suspicion of Manzano—instead of Don Manuel Pipa or the muleteer Don Dionisio Covadonga, both of whom had more recently had access to the bird—illustrates his stereotyping of Manzano in accordance with the stereotypes of blacks and the expectations of a trickster.

2.8 Agency and Truth Claim

In order to judge the effectiveness of a testimonial, one must seek to determine whether or not the goals of its author—most importantly, the acquisition of agency and the credibility of its truth claim—have been achieved. Manzano's chief goal in writing was the attainment of his manumission, a goal which he achieved at the very latest within two years of the initial publication of *Autobiografía de un esclavo*, since the earliest possible date of publication is 1835 and the two contested dates of his manumission are 1836 and 1837 (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 6, 14, 31). However, both his freedom and his goals of an improved quality of life and continued success as an author were

compromised. For the duration of his status as a free person, his literary output was less than what it had been during his enslavement (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 29). In 1845, he was imprisoned by the colonial authorities for his alleged involvement in the Ladder Conspiracy. He was eventually acquitted and released, yet was so disillusioned that in the nine remaining years of his life, he wrote no more literature (30). While he attempted several other occupations including sewing, painting, and cooking, his success in these was limited (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 15; Manzano, *Life* 39). His final years were marked by a melancholy, whose primary distinction from the one experienced during his enslavement was that he saw no means of overcoming it and lost the will to try (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 15, 30).

Manzano's most noteworthy literary achievement is undoubtedly his autobiography, since it became the foundational text for Cuban slave narratives (Manzano, *Autobiografía* 30). It is interesting that, in a letter that Manzano writes to Domingo del Monte during his enslavement, he expresses his desire to write a true Cuban novel after being freed. This is somewhat ironic, since his greatest work was written and published during his enslavement, and very little was written or published by him afterward. This discrepancy raises questions regarding the factors that motivated the publication of Manzano's autobiography and why their effect on his post-manumission work was diminished. Ivan Schulman suggests that, once the tension regarding his central desire for freedom was eliminated and he was faced with the limitations placed on people of African origin in his historical milieu, he lost both his ambition and sense of purpose, and submitted to a period of despondency (29). Each of these factors likely influenced his reduced output as a free writer, particularly during the nine years after his

imprisonment. Another possibility is that the Del Monte tertulia's interest in him had begun to subside, since his now-former symbolic status as a slave could no longer be used to garner support for the group's progressive agenda (Olsen 137). The Creole national project, which did not welcome black intellectualism, would have discouraged any autonomous political expression from Manzano (137-38). In addition, many free Cubans of color were ambivalent regarding the status of slaves and were just as likely to join in the repression of blacks in order to protect their own interests as they were to sympathize with slave rebellions (137). Manzano continued to participate in the literary nationalism of the nineteenth century through his affiliation with the Del Monte tertulia, and even published a play *Zafira*, which, while set in the sixteenth century Muslim kingdom of Mauritania/Argel, functioned as an allegorical treatment of colonialism and slavery in Cuba. However, this play never achieved the popularity of *Autobiografía de un esclavo* and Manzano's importance for the tertulia was marginalized (138). His career as a free author, much like his life as a free person, was anti-climactic. It has been speculated that this was one reason that a second part to his autobiography never appeared. It has been commented that his general silence and limited publication after his emancipation shows his awareness of occupying a socio-racial liminality somewhere between slave and free (Branche 84). While such a status was not entirely Manzano's choice, it echoes the indeterminate status of many tricksters whose access to two social milieus ironically limits the degree of their freedom in either one. The tertulia's virtual jettisoning of Manzano after the publication of *Autobiografía* is reminiscent of the deconstruction of a fetish after its owner's death (Palmié 864). Palmié himself draws a parallel between this practice and the emancipation of elderly slaves whose capacity for

work was outweighed by the cost of their maintenance. Incidentally, Manzano was emancipated shortly after the publication of his narrative, yet his worsening personal and professional situations echo Palmié's statement that slaves who had outlived their usefulness were "emancipated to forms of obliteration of their identity." The irony of this parallel is that, in Afro-Caribbean thought, the dismantling of a fetish is contingent upon the assent of the spirit—an assent not granted by Manzano (Palmié 864). This comparison should also underscore similarities between the perception of fetishes by followers of the Yoruba and Santería traditions, and the perception of slaves by their owners. Both are thought to have the potential for animation, free will, and agency, yet their attainment of these characteristics is largely dependent on their owners. Like a fetish, Manzano was the construct of his owners and literary collaborators both in his life—in terms of food, clothing, enculturation—and in his textual depiction. In life, he was granted special privileges by both groups of people, so long as such privileges yielded benefits for the people in power. In his textual realization, he was animated through the rendering of his narrative upon a reading public, yet many years passed before the work's historical significance was appreciated. To express this terms of meta-tropes, the *nkisi* of Manzano's text was constructed and imposed upon a group client—the reading public, yet aside from facilitating his legal emancipation, its initial effect was marginal and its benefits for both Manzano and readers quickly dissipated. Many years passed until, through its republication in the twentieth century, both the text and its narrator were figuratively reanimated and reinterpreted. In effect, this belated change yielded a reversal in the relationship between signifier and signified and the transition of Manzano and his narrative from *nkisi* to *simbi*.

Manzano's willingness to compromise the authenticity of his narrative as a whole for the purpose of realizing his own freedom is reminiscent of his behavior in the incident involving the missing capon. At least two other parallels exist between this episode and the narrative as a whole. In both cases, Manzano's escape from bondage depended less on his own discursive skill than on the intervention of others who spoke on his behalf: the mulatta Simona and the muleteer Dionisio in the specific episode, Del Monte and Madden in the case of his official emancipation. Also, apart from the initial euphoria of being freed in each instance, the quality of Manzano's life was little improved. The similarities between these contexts underscore the doubtfulness of both Manzano's truth claim and his achievement of agency. To echo Heather Russell's sentiment regarding editors and translators, one may even go so far as to say that the members of the Del Monte tertulia usurped from Manzano the roles of both *griot* and trickster, since, as readers, critics, and co-writers, they appropriated the means of communication and refashioned—based largely on their own interests—a story which was not their own. As such, they—like the Yoruba trickster orisha Legba—acquired agency at the expense of the person they were purporting to help.

Del Monte shared Manzano's ambition of writing a truly Cuban novel, and even though *Autobiografía* is not a novel *per se*, it has, nonetheless, been recognized as a foundational work. The use of first person testimony, direct address, and the voice of the Other by Manzano, and the authorization of the text by an influential group of editors may enhance the credibility of the text to a certain degree. However, the high degree of selective creativity involved in its composition by both Manzano and his editors diminishes its truth claim. Given the extensive revision carried out by Madden and the

exploitation of the revised text by both Madden and Del Monte, it may be fair to say that, for a number of reasons, some of the agency achieved by Manzano was ultimately transferred to his collaborators. Evidence of Manzano's limited agency may be found in his privileged status among other slaves, his fame as a performer and an author, the interest—albeit temporary—of members of the Del Monte Tertulia, and his distinction as the first slave to publish an autobiography in Spanish. The changes which the Del Monte Tertulia imposed on Manzano's text prior to its publication culminated the discursive cycle initiated by Manzano and initiated a new cycle with a revised text. In doing so, they created a new "fetish" or signifier that, in turn, yielded both a new signified and a new signifier-signified relationship. Such a change corresponds with the transition from *nkisi* to *simbi* in Piedra's Yoruba-based semiotics and brings to mind the trickster-like role of Coco Macaco in reshaping a text and its meaning. The members of this tertulia did not purport to be an outgrowth of any African-based tradition; yet in several ways, their editorial intervention parallels the role of the Yoruba trickster figure in signifying upon the work of a mulatto writer who draws from both black and white traditions. Their intervention sheds further doubt on Manzano's agency.

Even though the majority of his so-called autobiography was not his own work, it still possesses a residual essence—not unlike the residual essence that each signified maintains from its signifier—which is emulated by authors, both enslaved and free, of later slave narratives in Spanish. That such an essence may survive revisions by white editors, transcend generational boundaries, and inspire both enslaved black or mulatto writers and free white abolitionists to strive for goals beyond those of the tertulia may be seen as a reversal of the relationship between signifier and signified and, as such, an

example of the meta-trope *simbi*. While members of the tertulia utilized Manzano's text to further their own immediate political goals, whose benefits to Manzano were both incidental and limited, the effect on future generations of African diaspora and on the genres of the Cuban novel and the slave narrative support the conclusion that Manzano's agency was not entirely quashed.

When trying to evaluate Manzano's agency, it also makes sense to consider role of the four Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes—*ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, *simbi*—in shaping Manzano's discourse and in achieving his goals as a writer. There are no explicit references in *Autobiografía* to any of these tropes. However, there are a significant number of events in the text whose discursive treatment parallels their semiotic functions. In many cases, their overtones in Yoruba or Santería cosmology are also apparent. All of these instances suggest the possibility that Manzano may have utilized his text—at least in part—as a means of promoting Afro-Caribbean values to future generations. This idea may seem contradictory to Manzano's attempts to distance himself from African influences and facilitate his assimilation into white culture. However, both the metonymic representation of ancestors via a *nkisi*—suggested by Manzano's proximity to the dead bodies during his imprisonment in the stocks—and his successful attempts to signify upon the discourse of other people in a manner reminiscent of *simbi* parallel Afro-Caribbean strategies for perpetuating the subaltern culture in a manner unbeknownst to metropolitan oppressors. His collection of scraps of paper with poetry to memorize at Don Dionisio's house also merits consideration here. While explicitly dealing only with texts in Spanish that represent a component of European culture, Manzano's treatment of them echoes the preparation of a *nkisi* whose ingredients included the remains of dead

ancestors. His actions may be interpreted as a superimposition of a Afro-Caribbean cultural element over a Spanish one. Moreover, they may constitute an act of signifying through their subtle promotion of subaltern culture in spite of their ostensible celebration of the metropolitan culture.

While a large percentage of slaves brought to the New World came from lands inhabited by the Yoruba, and the Yoruba culture did achieve a sort of Pan-African significance both in Africa and the Caribbean, there is no explicit evidence of genetic or cultural ties between Manzano and the Yoruba. If Manzano was unaware of Yoruba culture and its broad influence in slave communities, then one must search for alternative explanations for the heavy coincidence of Yoruba-derived tropes in his narrative. Prominent nineteenth and twentieth century historians and philosophers of history have suggested the ubiquity of the four master tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony—in all texts. Vico and Burke have gone even further, purporting that the four master tropes were keys to the human mind's interaction with reality (Schaeffer 13).

While Manzano's attempt to "whiten" his identity may have come close to a denial of his African roots, his white editors and publishers in the *Del Monte* tertulia emphasized his African identity. They did this by stressing his token status as an unusual slave, describing his highly mimetic tendencies, and illustrating his error-prone use of Spanish. While Manzano's unique talents may serve to demonstrate his potential for civilization, the emphasis placed on his mimetic proclivity and linguistic mistakes may have been intended for a contradictory, satirical effect. *Del Monte's* inclusion of multiple examples of Manzano's mimesis of whites could be satirical for several reasons. It could reflect the belief in blacks' innate capacity for imitation. The depiction of this very talent

could serve to belittle blacks through an implicit comparison with simians, who are distinguished by their mimetic propensity, but act on it without due reflection. Second, it could be interpreted as a betrayal of his black identity. Third, his imperfect imitation of white speech could imply his inherent inferiority.

Heather Russell portrays reading as an activity whose aim is the empowerment of the reader, and whose interpretative component is dependent on Legba (Russell 163). In other words, the transfer of agency—or *àshe*—from narrator to reader depends on the trickster's intervention. She also claims that a common strategy of empowerment in African-American literature involves calling up the past, guaranteeing an ancestral presence, maintaining its longevity, with the goal of liberating readers from the delimiting Western epistemological tradition (161). Manzano essentially realizes all three components of this strategy by narrating and having published his own experiences in writing. His goal of writing a truly Cuban novel, while vague and open to interpretation, likely constitutes in part a type of liberation from existing literary restrictions. While the intervention of white editors does yield an alteration of his text, it does not prevent him from executing these components or achieving their goal.

Manzano's self-portrayal constitutes a breach of the Western epistemological tradition in several ways. In the most apparent sense, he demonstrates that people of African origin may achieve and excel in the production and comprehension of language via both oral and written means—a fact largely unappreciated by most of his contemporaries. While his pre-literate discursive achievements all constituted the assimilation of elements of white literature such as sermons, poems, and plays, his manner of acquisition—listening and memorization—and his mode of performance—

recitation—relied entirely on oral language. Such extensive oral assimilation is not unprecedented in European and European-based cultures, yet it plays a much more central role in African cultures. While Manzano was probably unaware of orality's key role in African epistemology, he still manifests its continuity through his oral performances and his oral-like style of writing.

2.9 Epistemological Irony and Its Relation to the Meta-Tropes

The issue of epistemological irony in terms of a conflict between different ideologies, as addressed by both Korhonen and White, is raised in two ways in Manzano's texts: the combination of both oral and written language, and the use of both Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes and the master tropes in no particular sequence (Korhonen 37, 42). *Ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi*—as well as their counterparts—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony—are all evident on both textual and metatextual levels in *Autobiografía*, yet none attains obvious predominance over the others in terms of frequency, structural sequence, or overall significance. While *nkisi* and *simbi* may be more frequently identifiable in the text than *ndoki* and *nganga*, this is at least partly due to their roles as relationships between a sign and its meaning, which is essentially the basis of all language. This echoes Piedra's claim that humans' obsession with signification constitutes the basis of all mythological systems. *Nkisi*'s role as a fetish in Yoruba thought and Piedra's esthetic interpretation of it as a meaning-producing transaction underscores its centrality (Piedra, *Monkey* 361). This idea is echoed in MacGaffey's analogy between an amulet—a tangible, primarily non-verbal fetish, although it may contain inscriptions—and a *nkisi*—an entity that may be tangible or

intangible, verbal or non-verbal, but is a fetish nevertheless. MacGaffey further compares the sequence of mediators between an original spirit and an amulet to the storyline of the origin myth of a *nkisi* and its line of priests. In an esthetic, literary context, the *nkisi* parallels the text itself while the line of priests corresponds with the writers and editors (*ndoki* and *nganga* respectively) who have shaped it (MacGaffey, *Complexity* 194). This line of reasoning may lead one to believe that *nkisi* is the predominant Afro-Caribbean trope in a text and that its counterpart, metonymy, enjoys a similar standing. This idea is reiterated both by the book's status as a fetish and by the interpolated tales within it that, aside from functioning as fetishes in their own right for the textual audiences of Manzano's interlocutors, parallel the incorporation of ingredients in a *nkisi*. Given *nkisi*'s—and *simbi*'s—divisibility into the two components of signifier and signified, its existence presupposes the existence of an emitter and an interpreter. Thus it necessitates the existence of *ndoki*—the artist—and *nganga*—the editor—even if the latter two are absent from the text. While the original spirit's essence is not entirely lost, it is transformed through editorial intervention so that the relationship between signifier and signified is reversed.

Since heterogeneous elements distinguish the character of each link in the storyline (MacGaffey, *Complexity* 194), this reversal is a multi-staged process that renders its own reversal impossible. Neither the original fetish/text—*nkisi*, nor its original author—*ndoki*, nor any editor—*nganga*—may be obtained in its original state. While all three entities—*ndoki*, *nkisi*, and *nganga*—are malleable in that they may undergo future changes, they are barred from reverting to their previous conditions by their interaction with other interlocutors and with the text. In other words, the text's original meaning is

forever lost; it may be approximated but never fully obtained. The *ndoki* and *nganga* are turned into a new *ndoki* and *nganga*, maintaining connections to their originals through a residual. Put differently, both the author and editors change their goals—and even, to an extent, their identities—as a result of their mutual interaction. The original text, *nkisi*, becomes *simbi*—a version of the original upon which signification has been rendered.

One may argue that, since the changes that occur to *ndoki* and *nganga* parallel those that occur to *nkisi*—they all undergo reversals of a sort, each constitutes a form of *simbi*. Each is reminiscent of a fetish or hex that has been constructed and subsequently applied to a client or victim—a process from which none escapes entirely unscathed. Just as irony is said to prevail over all of the tropes in the Western semiotic tradition, *simbi* prevails over and, to an extent, assimilates the other three Yoruba meta-tropes. The text has lost its newness, and the author and editor(s) their innocence. Yet even these changes do not yield complete understanding on the part of any participant. Left here, however, this figurative rendition parallels the process that occurs to virtually any text—a metatextual application of which Manzano was probably unaware.

Simbi—or irony—exceeds the other tropes in the sense that both the original *ndoki* of the text—Manzano—and his various *ngangas*—including Del Monte, Madden, and other members of the tertulia—were deceived regarding their expectations of what the text would ultimately communicate to readers. Manzano could not have known the full extent of the revisions made to his text after its submission. Conversely, the white tertulia members were probably unaware of the text's parallels with Afro-Caribbean tropes and their meta-critical implications about its authorship and truthfulness. Perhaps the most significant manifestation of *simbi*, reversal, and trickery by Manzano is his

acquisition of the fetish/hex of literacy and his acquisition of it to the predicament of his enslavement. The gathering and mixing of ingredients for his literary *nkisi* was witnessed, discouraged, punished, and even temporarily forgotten by members of the white metropolitan establishment. Yet Manzano succeeded in reproducing these ingredients mimetically and paradigmatically as metaphors for his ambitions, utilizing them syntagmatically and metonymically/synecdochically in the construction of his own text, and ultimately in initiating a chain of literary actions and reactions, whose published product, while not entirely autobiographical, established Manzano's place at the forefront of a new genre in the Latin American canon.

Chapter 3

Abū Bakr eṣ Ṣadīq: A Signifier Masquerading as a Signified

“Routes in North Africa by Abū Bekr eṣ ṣiddīk” [sic] is unique among Caribbean slave narratives in several important ways. Due to the unique cultural background of its author, it was influenced by cultural and literary expectations different from those of most narratives. Originally written in Arabic by a Muslim slave, it was influenced by different personal motives and generic expectations than the majority of narratives written in the Caribbean. While there are no explicit references to Yoruba culture in this narrative, Yoruba influences may still be present. Abū Bakr was a Muslim who lived in a region that was populated and influenced by Yoruba-speaking peoples. As a result, a certain degree of cultural syncretism occurred between Muslims, the Yoruba, and other affiliated peoples to the point that the Yoruba population gradually came to include large numbers of Muslims. As a Muslim slave in the Caribbean, Abū Bakr assumed a liminal and ambiguous status that most other slaves did not. He was valued for his literacy and work ethic, yet he was also viewed more suspiciously due to the fear against Muslims for their stereotypical likelihood to lead or participate in revolts. While the degree of his involvement in the Jamaican slave revolt of 1832 is uncertain, there is strong evidence to suggest that he continued to practice Islam under the guise of a conversion to Christianity, in spite of Islam’s prohibition in Jamaica. Maintaining the good will of his owners—one of whom ultimately became his emancipator—was instrumental to obtaining his freedom. Thus it was necessary to mask any connection with the slave

uprising. While conversions to Christianity were common among Muslim slaves in Jamaica, many were mere gestures of compliance that masked slaves' religious subversion. It is reasonable to believe that Abū Bakr's conversion followed this trend. His autobiographical narrative does not allude to his conversion, yet both his correspondence with Muḥammad Kaba Saghanughu and the memoir of Richard Robert Madden do. While the narrative is probably accurate about his religious affiliation, it may still be categorized as one of several attempts by Abū Bakr to forge a new cultural identity. For this reason, it is important to view both his life in Jamaica and his narrative in terms of their trickster-like functions. To do this, I will analyze relevant details in the genre of Arabic autobiography; cultural syncretism between Yoruba and Muslim traditions in Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and the Caribbean; the four Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes and the four master tropes; and the Yoruba trickster figure. I will also discuss ways in which slavery in these regions helped to engender trickster-like tendencies among slaves, and ways in which slaves' classification and behavior parallel those of rhetorical tropes.

3.1 The Arabic Autobiographical Tradition

It is also important to consider Abū Bakr's account in light of the Arabic autobiographical tradition. One of the foremost authorities on this topic was the Egyptian judge, legal scholar and writer Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, who identified three basic motivations for writing autobiographies in the Arabic tradition: to express gratitude for God's blessings; to provide an account of an exemplary life, whose acts and virtues others may emulate; and to provide information about life and conditions that can be used

in the biographical and historical works of later authors (Reynolds 3). Some of his other observations, while not establishing a definite link to Abū Bakr's narrative, still show clear similarities. In his view, writing an autobiography is an act of emulation of earlier authors, and one that will allow future authors to emulate the present authors. Like many medieval Arabic scholars, al-Suyūṭī perceived life not as a static linear progression, but as a sequence of changing conditions and states which were influenced by both the passage of time and changing fortunes. Such changing fortunes were contrasted to the few areas in which genuine accrual over time was thought possible: intellectual development, spiritual understanding, creation of scholarship and literature, and the cultivation of offspring and students (4). The idea of a non-linear description of changing conditions is evident in the topical arrangement of Abū Bakr's narrative. One can also see the juxtaposition of changing fortunes with periods of accrual.

While the Arabic tradition includes a number of different biographical writing styles, the one which corresponds most closely to Abū Bakr's account is that of *tarjama*. While the modern term *tarjama* means "translation" or "interpretation," in classical Arabic, it also referred to the provision of a title or heading of a work or section subsumed by a title. As a biographical notice, it may be taken to mean a representation of the person, an imperfect copy of a life. This genre's acknowledged function as an imperfect representation as well as its connotative aspect of translating or interpreting parallels the process of remembrance by taking into account the changes that occur to a story's content and veracity as it is received and retold. The basic components of the *tarjama* include the subject's name and ancestry, date of birth, (and death, where applicable), list of teachers, bibliography of written works, accounts of travel and

pilgrimage, and entertaining or enlightening anecdotes. Sometimes, they also include personal letters, formal epistles, poetry, descriptions of visions and dreams, and mention of minor miracles and virtues (Reynolds 42-43). The topics of ancestry, teachers, travel accounts and pilgrimages are all included in Abū Bakr's narrative. While the translations attributed to G. C. Renouard are not accompanied by letters between Abū Bakr and Muḥammad Kaba, Madden does include two such letters in his own memoirs, *Twelve Months Residence in the West Indies* (Wilks 157).

Related to the topics of both biological and education heritage is the tendency among Arabic authors to depict themselves as both distinct individuals and participants in various relationships, the clearest of which in the text are the “vertical” or “genealogical” type (Reynolds 243). These extend for multiple generations in the past and future and are divided into two basic categories: familial and educational (243-44). The relationships with teachers are meticulously described and students are mentioned. Relatively little is said about lateral relationships with siblings, fellow students, friends and colleagues. In Abū Bakr's narrative, the few details included about his relationships are restricted to establishing genealogical connections with generations preceding his own. The allusion to forbearers and the elision of contemporaries may be influenced by the general desire among authors to illustrate their roles in the passage of history. In this case, predecessors would have constituted a tradition to be continued, whereas contemporaries would have detracted from its focus. Related to this goal was the transmission of authority, legitimacy and descent. Authors often sought to distinguish themselves from others on intellectual or moral terms (244). While Abū Bakr makes no explicit references to his own social status in Timbuktu, he refers to important posts held by his father and

grandfather. He attempts to establish his legitimacy through the references to his ancestors and teachers. Further, his discussion of his faith serves to establish his moral superiority with respect to non-Muslims, and possibly with respect to other Muslims who have not adhered to the tenets of their faith. Since autobiographies provided opportunities to defend one's honor in the case of wrongdoing, misinterpretation, or slander, Abū Bakr's discussion of his religious piety may also have served this purpose (Reynolds 247).

Since education plays a central role for Abū Bakr, his father, and the cities of Timbuktu and Bouna where he spent most of his childhood, it is logical to consider his text in light of the genre of academic autobiography. Most academic autobiographies in classical Arabic literature emphasize the records of accomplishments of their authors. Their main components include the subject's name, genealogy, date and place of birth, teachers, texts read on different subjects, student travels, posts held, publications by himself and his students, and visions. However, there is some variety even within this genre in terms of content and form. The components may be arranged in different ways, and the emphasis varies from one to another (Ghamdi 179). Some texts emphasize unique aspects of authors' personalities (180). Others focus primarily on teachers, books, and travels. Three of the latter include the autobiographies of Ibn al-Jazri, Ibn Hajar and Lisan al-Din Ibn al-Khatib (152, 181). Ibn al-Jazri starts narrating at the beginning of his life. He provides his full name, date of birth, his studies of Qur'an and *ḥadith*, and mentions a pilgrimage to Mecca (156). He goes on to mention further travels and studies and various judicial appointments (157). Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani provides a brief autobiography in the third person about his academic life. He discusses judges of Egypt.

He mentions his birth, the migration of his family from Palestine to Egypt, his orphaning, schooling, and memorization of the Qur'an. His account includes his teachers, his study of literature and of *ḥadith* transmitters, and his writing of poetry (Ghamdi 158). The last part of the document describes his writings and professional career, including teaching at various colleges and ultimately his appointment as chief judge in Egypt (159). Lisan al-Din Ibn al-Khatib gives a brief description of himself and his origin, the prominence of himself and his family in political and intellectual life of Al-Andalus, a list of his teachers, and a list of works. His account also includes examples of poetry and prose (152). He includes texts of various legislations written for him by two sultans. Also alluded to are his teachers and the places where he studied different subjects. The final 172 pages focus on literary aspects of his writing (154). His two main purposes for writing are to identify himself, and compete with the subjects of his writing (153).

Some scholars criticize Arabic autobiographies in general on the grounds that they are not comprehensive enough. This raises the issue of what constitutes comprehensiveness in an autobiography and whether or not such comprehensiveness is possible (Ghamdi 207-08). One view is that a comprehensive text must include all details that have been previously covered on this topic by other sources. To evaluate this, one must consider different factors, such as the author's goal, the quality of his memory, and the deliberate concealment of certain details (208-09). Another topic related to the criteria of comprehensiveness is the period of an author's life that is covered. Authors often omit certain periods from their personal accounts. The most obvious of these would be events of which the subject lacks direct awareness, such as birth, death, and the stages of life that are adjacent to them. By token of this, some critics say that an

autobiography can never be complete (Ghamdi 198). If a writer begins writing late in life, his memory regarding the early years may fail him. When he starts writing at an early age, he limits the passage of time covered between the experience and its written recording (199). Old age may be left out deliberately or inadvertently. Among Arabic authors who lived to old age, some of their texts contain only brief references to this period of their lives. Other authors have considered it too close to the period of writing. Reasons to avoid writing about recent events include potential endangerment of the author's life or offense of his contemporaries (203-04). This could have been a motive for Abū Bakr, given his association with people involved in slave rebellions, as well as the uncertainty regarding his conversion to Christianity.

An important factor to consider when analyzing Arabic autobiographies is the motives that influence their composition (Ghamdi 190). According to al-Suyūṭī, these include recounting God's bounties as an expression of gratitude, sharing their situation in order to be imitated by others, self-justification or self-defense (Ghamdi 191), sharing knowledge with others after one's death (194), self-presentation to contemporaries, providing an authorized version of one's life, and achieving enduring fame (195). There are differing views regarding the first motive—recounting God's bounties. Many classical Arabic autobiographers thought that writing was a gesture of thanks to God and, thus, an act of worship (193). In some cases, however, such a claim could merely be a pretext for publicizing information about oneself (192). In this respect, it provides a culturally acceptable and ostensibly modest means of self-preservation. Other common motives relate to the idea of self-preservation as well. An autobiography could provide a self-authorized version of one's life, or influence accounts of one's life written by others

(Ghamdi 195). Since it could influence a Muslim scholar's credibility, it was sometimes used as a preemptive defense against criticism from competitors or historians (194).

Some scholars of Arabic autobiography emphasize the importance of a confession of sin for determining an autobiography's sincerity and veracity. Yet neither the Arabic nor the Islamic tradition encourages the discussion of personal sins, and most Arabic autobiographies do not contain confessions (Ghamdi 212, 215). Since Abū Bakr makes only a brief confession of sin, without giving specific details, he at least approximates the Arabic tradition by de-emphasizing the topic. Sometimes confessions are idealized based on how an author wishes his life to appear. The coverage of an author's mental and psychological development may serve to provide advice regarding typical problems in life, survival techniques, or a means of salvation (216).

An important topic in any autobiography is the question of its objectivity or subjectivity. Autobiography is dependent on memory, which is sometimes unreliable, especially for writers for whom more time has transpired between an event and its recording. It also depends on both the conscious and unconscious interpretation of events (Ghamdi 223). For these two reasons, autobiographies inevitably contain a subjective component. Objective truth may be found in them, but it necessarily coexists with subjective elements. It has been said that subjective elements reflect more about an author's personality than do objective ones (224). By favoring subjectivity over objectivity, this view calls into question the veracity of the autobiographical genre as a whole. It also raises the question of which trope takes precedence over others. Since metaphor is generally associated with poetry and subjectivity and metonymy with prose and objectivity, the aforementioned observation about autobiography would tend to

support the assumption that metaphor is predominant. While metonymy may be used in a subjective manner, it is the master trope most often noted for its explicatory function. It is thought to elucidate what other tropes obscure.

Of course, the absence of objective material does not necessitate the absence of metonymy. Throughout the Arabic autobiographical genre, the use of metonymy is widespread in the representation of connections of various networks of power. Such networks are considered fundamental to a person's identity and may involve ancestors, teachers, topics studied and publications—all of which are prevalent topics in Arabic autobiographies. The first three of these constitute factors of a person's identity, while the last one constitutes a product. Nonetheless, things or people in each network are metonymic as parts that represent the whole of the person by informing readers about elements that contribute to a person's identity. To the extent that lessons from former teachers, prior events, or achievements become ingrained in a person's self-perception and influence that person's subsequent thoughts and actions, they may even be said to constitute part of his identity. In Yoruba, KiKongo, and African diasporic cultures, this phenomenon parallels the manner in which elements gathered in the preparation of a *nkisi* ultimately become part of it. Another similarity between the two contexts is the combination of animate and inanimate elements. Such a mixture in a *nkisi* parallels the combination of people, events, experiences and ideas in the composition of an autobiography. An autobiography, similar to a *nkisi*, is a naturally inanimate object that takes on a lifelike appearance when imbued with certain qualities. A further similarity between Arabic autobiographical and African or African-derived traditions is the incorporation of an artificial mixture (consisting of both animate and inanimate

components) into the body of an animate being. In the Yoruba tradition, this is found in the mixture of a *nkisi* with the blood of a senior *nganga* priest and the mixture of his blood with that of a junior priest. In the Arabic autobiographical tradition, it is evident in the allusion to genealogical, educational, and professional networks to create a preemptive identity for a person while that person is still alive.

3.2 The Role of Slavery in the Process of Cultural Assimilation

Islam allowed that slavery could legally result from three conditions: being born to a slave parent, being captured during war (as long as the captive was not already a Muslim), and being purchased. In the early stage of Islam, a free man was also allowed to sell himself or his family into slavery, though this practice was forbidden by the Caliphs after Muḥammad. Religious law established conditions for slaves. They had no legal powers, could not offer testimony in court, were excluded from religious functions, and owners had to pay any fines which they accumulated. Owners had to meet slaves' needs, provide medical attention, provide for old age, avoid overworking, and eventually allow emancipation. Under Islamic law, the child's status as free or slave was determined by the mother's status, except when a free man was married to a slave woman. In this case, the children were free to avoid being enslaved by their own father (El-Hamel 34). Islam also recognized a difference between a freeborn person and freed slave. Freed slaves maintained connections with their former masters. This allowed masters to inherit from former slaves if they died. It also provided former slaves with an ersatz family, family name, and fictive lineage (35).

The *jihāds* in the northern savannah created a new slaving frontier based on a rejuvenated Islam. Muslim reformers often took slaves from their enemy masters and re-enslaved them, thus reversing the process of assimilation that was already in effect (Lovejoy, *Transformations* 154). Yoruba civil wars were the primary source of slaves for Yoruba states, but also provided significant imports to other towns, particularly those that identified as Hausa or Muslim. Like *jihāds*, these wars had the effect of creating an internal frontier of enslavement (Lovejoy, *Transformations* 157).

The racist ideology in fifteenth-century Iberia was strongly influenced by Islamic rule. By the ninth century, Muslims had begun distinguishing between black and white slaves. This can be seen in the uses of two Arabic words for slave. The word '*abd*' connoted a legal meaning, but in popular speech it referred only to black slaves. White slaves were commonly called *mamluks* and commanded higher prices than black ones. The word *mamluk* is derived from the Arabic passive participle *mamlūk* (pl. *mamālīk*) meaning "owned" or "possessed" (*mamlūk*). Its own Spanish derivative, *mameluco*, evidences its importance in this region. A *mamluk* was viewed as an investment to protect, while an '*abd*' was valued based on his labor and considered expendable. Black slaves did the hardest labor. White slaves were usually household servants (Sweet 145). Free blacks were also identified as '*abid*', bearing a title with a derogatory connotation even though they were no longer slaves (146). Opportunities for free blacks were limited, and they were considered social and ethnic inferiors to other groups. The anti-black prejudice held by Iberian Muslims can be seen in the following quotation of Toledo historian Sā'id al-Andalusi:

For those peoples...who live near and beyond the equinoctial line to the limit of the inhabited world in the south, the long presence of the sun at the zenith makes the

air hot and the atmosphere thin. Because of this their temperaments become hot and their humors fiery, their color black and their hair woolly. Thus, they lack self-control and steadiness of mind and are overcome by fickleness, foolishness, and ignorance. Such are the blacks, who live at the extremity of the land of Ethiopia, the Nubians, the Zanj and the like. (Sweet 146)

Many climatological characteristics were used to justify prejudice against black slaves in Muslim communities. However, it is unclear whether the climate theory came before stereotypes about blacks or vice versa. Examples exist in the diary of Ibn Battuta, written in the fourteenth century, about his travels through Mali (146). Christian and Muslim racial imagery were similar in constituting both a rejection of blackness and a desire of lighter skinned people to protect their social superiority by emphasizing its civility. In the fifteenth century, Ibn Khaldun associated animal-like characteristics with blacks and used this to justify their enslavement (147). Muslim teaching associated slavery with unbelief. Once European countries became more stable after the eleventh century, ethnically fragmented African countries appeared more vulnerable. As such, blackness became a metaphor for vulnerability and facilitated their perception of Africans as inferior (149).

Over time, Iberian Christians became more tolerant of the Muslim system of slavery and eventually adopted it. They also created new arguments to defend the enslavement of Africans. Not only were blacks in Iberia not Christians, but as servants of Muslims, they were the other's other. Also, their skin color contrasted more with that of white Iberians than with that of Muslims (Sweet 149). Latin texts of the early period recognized the difference between light skinned and dark skinned slaves. The former were called *sarracenus*, alluding to their Eastern origin, and the latter were called

maurus, reflecting their African heritage. As early as 1332, documents on slave sales show racially-based differences in their prices (Sweet 150).

In addition to racially-based gradations of slaves, there existed similar gradations among free Muslims. Both the Almohads and the Spanish considered the worst type of Muslim to be the sub-Saharan Almoravids. The distinction between black and white Muslims was not made solely by Christians, but also by the lighter skinned Muslims (Sweet 153). Iberian Christians' ideas about the underworld reinforced anti-black stereotypes by describing demons in Hell as black, and considering both to be savage, evil creatures synonymous with sin (154). In the later 1400s, the Ottoman Turks forbade the sale of Muslim slaves to Christians on religious grounds. Even so, most of Castile's slaves at this time were both Muslim and Caucasian. After the 1400s, slavery in Castile would be considered appropriate only for blacks (155).

It has been said that slaves in Arab and Muslim countries did not, for the most part, perform hard labor like those in the Americas. Their tasks included household chores, serving in harems, in armies, and in government bureaucracies (Murray 14). Nevertheless, slaves were still dehumanized in a variety of ways. According to Jay Spaulding, one definition of a slave was “*al-hayawān al-nātiq*” or “the talking animal”. To reinforce this idea, slaves were often given names that clearly distinguished them from free persons to prevent their integration. In some cases, a freed person maintained servile status even after formal manumission and could be jointly owned by several people (Toledano, *Slavery* 17).

The harem system, which existed throughout much of the Middle East and North Africa, grew out of a need in Ottoman society to segregate gender and limit women's

accessibility to men outside of their families. Households had two separate sections: the *selamlık* that housed male members; and the *haremlık*, which housed females—including concubines—and children. The master's mother or first wife ruled the *haremlık*, although eunuchs often assisted. Apart from eunuchs—who, at least for reproductive purposes, had been denied their masculinity—and the sultan himself, no males were allowed in this area (Toledano, *Slavery* 29).

In spite of their various forms of suffering, eunuchs generally benefitted from their status in several ways. While many eunuchs claimed to have been manumitted at some point during their careers, this seemed to have little effect on their employment since the wealth and prestige that it afforded encouraged them to stay and eliminated the need for coercion (Toledano, *Slavery* 51). Due to eunuchs' mediating function as brokers of sensitive information between members of different genders and social echelons, they possessed an additional source of power (52). In this regard, their function and corresponding agency were similar to those of a griot in West Africa and the trickster figure Eshu of Yoruba folklore.

Islamic cultures generally prioritized intellectual qualities over physical ones. The belief that blacks were more physically powerful but less intelligent than other races was used to rationalize condescension towards them on the part of lighter-skinned Muslims and Christians (Segal 47). By the Middle Ages, separate terms were used to distinguish between a black slave—'*abd*'—and a non-black slave—'*mamluk*' (49). The degree of cruelty with which slaves were treated often varied according to their skin color. For purposes of castration, whites generally had only the testicles removed, whereas blacks underwent the most radical form, referred to as "level with the abdomen."

This was based on the belief that blacks had an uncontrollable sexual appetite (Segal 52). White slaves were often given preferential working conditions. For example, the servants and guards of the innermost palace of Sultan Mehmed II were all white male slaves, who came mostly in the form of tribute from conquered Christian communities (108). Further, the domestic administration and training of royal pages in his new palace were led by white eunuchs from Christian Europe and Circassia. Black eunuchs were confined to the old palace and subjected to a more extreme form of circumcision (109).

Assimilation was facilitated by interbreeding of different races and social echelons. After the first two Ottoman Sultans, the children of almost all subsequent Sultans were born from concubines rather than from wives. Sultans during this period generally avoided marriage except to a close concubine or to a woman from an Anatolian tribe in order to bind that tribe. Since power was transferred patriarchally, slave maternity was not a barrier to inheriting the sultanate (Segal 109). The chief black eunuch was in many ways like the sultan's chief private minister (112). The Ottoman Empire nominally abolished slavery in 1889, but continued to practice it until 1924 when the Caliphate was formally terminated and replaced with a secular state (117). Even so, eunuchs continued to be purchased and used long after the prohibition of slavery, sometimes by ministers of the interior who were in charge of enforcing the prohibition (Toledano, *Slavery* 50).

In the Ottoman Empire and other parts of the Muslim world, many people in positions of authority originally entered the network of government by being purchased as slaves (Toledano, *Slavery* 27). Others, if not purchased themselves, were the offspring of purchased slaves. One example of the latter was Mūlāy Ismā'il, the second 'Alawid

Sultan who lived from 1672-1727 in Morocco. The son of a black concubine, he eventually came to control a black slave army that numbered between 50,000 and 250,000 (Segal 55). In Muslim countries, there was a higher rate of assimilation and concubinage among slaves. This partially explains why this region had fewer dramatic racial confrontations than the Americas (60). Muslim countries also had a higher rate of manumission and no institutionalized racism as in the United States. The Muslim slave trade extended well beyond the four centuries of the Atlantic trade (61). Slavery in Muslim countries was reputed to be more humane than in the Americas. The Ottoman Empire followed the Islamic law which stipulated that slaves had certain rights. In fact, some free-born Muslims who were exempt from enslavement by other Muslims by token of their religion, bribed or manipulated their way into becoming slaves of the Sultan, in hopes of improving their living conditions and possibly obtaining high office (106).

3.3 Matrices of Belonging: Patronage, Detachment, and Re-attachment

Slaveholding societies were dependent on systems of patronage. This was often maintained by force, but sometimes it involved voluntary reciprocity between master and slave (Toledano, *Silent* 8). In the Ottoman Empire and in the West Indies, unattached people were marginalized and more easily exploited than those who belonged to networks of power. This led to both physical and economic danger. People who lacked a relationship of belonging to a household, guild or religious organization were isolated and lacked identity (29). They were conspicuous from the rest of the population who could identify each other by face, name, clothes and appearance (29-30). Consequently, they were marked as strangers, and engendered suspicion and mistrust (30). For Africans

or others who had been uprooted from their kin groups and placed in new, fictive kin groups with patrons, reattachment was an important goal. Slaves often attempted to maintain ties with members of their biological families. Nevertheless, the concept and implementation of new kin groups was a major component of slave life. If reattachment was successful, it partially compensated slaves' for the loss of biological kin (Toledano, *Silent* 31).

The period during which many reforms in Ottoman slavery were realized is known as the *Tanzimat*, a Turkish term that means "reforms, reorderings, or reorganizations (Toledano, *Ottoman* 477-78). They are thought to have been begun by the Gülhane Rescript of 1839 and lasted through the first Ottoman constitution of 1876 until the reinstitution of the sultanic autocracy in 1878. The *Tanzimat* are often seen as a trend begun by Europeans to bring Western forms and to modernize the Ottoman Empire. However, these were supported by a highly motivated Ottoman-based group of changers (Toledano, *Ottoman* 478). Manumission entailed a threat of detachment because it would sever the ties created in the master-slave relationship. Without this attachment, slaves risked social marginalization, which exposed them to hazards (Toledano, *Silent* 32). During this period of Ottoman history, slaves' status outside of networks made them vulnerable. These networks included guilds, Sufi brotherhoods, village communities, urban quarters, tribal groups, mosques, local associations. When approached by slaves who sought manumission, the *Tanzimat* tended to provide patronage (111). However, some slaves feared this change and chose not to be manumitted even when they had the option of doing so.

An important component of reattachment with an obvious influence on slaves' identity was renaming (Toledano, *Silent* 31). Renaming was a highly symbolic act. One purpose was to eliminate the old identity, since older identities were often considered uncivilized, primitive, and religiously deficient if they reflected a religion different from that of the owner (31-32). A second, complementary purpose was to replace the old name chosen by the parents with a new one assigned by the owners. Re-naming was a dual act that involved detachment from the old context and reattachment in a new one (67). Reminiscent of the first stage in a communicative act, it replaces the original signifier with a new one. This new signifier has at least two important signifieds: alteration of one's previous identity on personal, cultural, and religious levels; and attachment to a new matrix of signification.

Surprisingly, manumission did not terminate ownership. Mutual dependence of former slaves and the former owners continued under patronage without official bondage (Toledano, *Slavery* 66). Freed slaves often stayed in family compounds and did services required by former owners. In return, they received protection in both social and economic forms (67). This phenomenon has a semiotic parallel. Even if an original signifier is replaced, its influence is not totally eliminated. In a linguistic context, this is evident in the historical connotations that certain words carry due to their etymologies. Members of a religious minority who convert to the majority religion often continue to bear a residual label with stigmatic connotations. While they may be grudgingly tolerated based on their new signifying label, they are still judged in large part based on their old label. This was certainly the case with the *conversos* in Golden-Age Spain who adopted Catholicism in place of either Judaism or Islam. To a less obvious extent, it was

also the case with Abū Bakr, the validity of whose conversion was doubted by his emancipator, Richard Robert Madden (Madden, *West Indies* 195).

Abū Bakr's renaming is relevant to the theory of master tropes for several reasons. First, both his original name and his new name serve as metaphors for the shift in his religious identity from Muslim to Christian. His new name serves as a mark of at least partial assimilation into the metropolitan white culture. While never considered a full member of this culture, his ostensible conversion and adoption of the Christian-sounding name Edward Donlan bring him closer to this goal. However, if accounts of his affiliation with covert Muslim groups practicing Islam under the guise of Christianity are true, then his new name is also ironic. It portrays a transition from a past religion to a new one, yet such a transition may have been short-lived, or even a deceitful gesture aimed at facilitating the propagation of Islam. This is not to say that Abū Bakr is exactly the same as he had been at first; he was undoubtedly influenced by his cultural and religious immersion among Christians in Jamaica. In the most obvious sense, his Islamic-oriented activities would be complicated by the Christian guise that he attempts to maintain via church attendance and a change of name. Further, his image as a noble savage is shaped in part by the allegation of his Christian conversion. While the category of noble savage included many people who were not Christians, this religious component makes his acceptance more palatable to the dominant social class in Jamaica.

3.4 Slave-Owning Slaves and Slaves Who Wielded Power over Free People

An enigmatic phenomenon in the field of slavery is the practice of slaves exercising authority over—or in some cases, owning—other slaves. A person who has

already endured the hardships of slavery might seem less likely to subjugate another on the basis of empathy. Even so, the opportunity to wield power or ownership over someone else was appealing in that it enhanced the bearer's relative position in the social hierarchy in keeping with the status quo. While a person who has already endured the hardships of slavery may seem less likely to subjugate another, the practice was fairly common. In some cases, slaves even wielded influence over free people. This practice is relevant to the narrative of Abū Bakr for several reasons. First, it may help explain why Abū Bakr tolerated an association with his master in Jamaica for as long as he did, even when it was no longer officially termed as enslavement. Also, the implications for humans involved in such relationships may have important rhetorical parallels with the theory of master tropes.

The practice of slaves owning other slaves has been documented in many of the contexts where slavery has existed. These include the Roman Empire, the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas (Saco, *Historia* 72). Many Muslim slaves in the Americas had previously traveled to regions of West Africa and the Muslim world where slavery was common (Landers 29). Of particular interest is its documentation in regions that were likely to influence cultural factors in Abū Bakr's life. In West Africa, this included both Yoruba and Muslim populations. Many Yoruba elite viewed slavery and pawnship as benevolent institutions that helped recruit labor and aid the needy (Lovejoy and Falola 110). Soldier-slaves and slaves who were personal attendants of large households had more opportunities of redemption and could benefit from wars in acquiring slaves of their own (120). Emancipated slaves sometimes bought slaves as status markers (130).

Also in West Africa, in the Sokoto Caliphate, bordering Bornu, descriptions of the slave hierarchy were similar to those in Cuba. In the Sokoto Caliphate, household slaves were more highly esteemed and enjoyed more privileges and a higher standard of living than those who worked on plantations. Plantations were run by overseers who were usually slaves themselves (Lovejoy, *Plantations* 344). In contrast to the Americas, however, where slaves could only be obtained through the market, slaves in Sokoto were just as likely to be obtained through raiding or warfare (346). In fact, slave-raiding, warfare, and territorial expansion were systematized under the guise of *jihād* (348-49). Although the Sokoto Caliphate was founded as the result of 'Uthmān dan Fodio's *jihād* from 1804-1808, his call for additional *jihāds* in the following years may have been done partly for the acquisition of slaves. Further, the acquisition of slaves there—and the hierarchy that existed among them—continued well into the twentieth century. Some slaves even possessed slaves of their own (Stilwell, et al. 273). Evidence of this is provided in an interview conducted in 1975 with *Sallama* Dako, a former high-ranking royal slave of Emir Sanusi Bayero, who ruled until 1963 (274-75). While *sallamas* were slaves themselves, they exercised power and influence over other slaves in a number of ways. Along with other high-ranking slaves, such as the *shamaki* and *danrimi*, *sallamas* owned farms which were worked by lower-ranking slaves (288). Further, they could—at least in a practical sense—possess slaves of their own, although according to Dako, such slaves were only on loan from the emir and could neither be bought nor sold by a *sallama* (289-90). At one point during his tenure, Dako himself allegedly inherited another *sallama*, who, based on his title, would have previously held a rank equal to that of Dako (287). Since royal slaves in the Sokoto Caliphate they were obedient to no one but the

emir, they enjoyed a degree of impunity beyond the reach of most free men and were thus able to behave abusively towards the latter. They acquired reputations for intimidating palace officials and for tormenting other slaves or members of the royal household who were under their tutelage (Stilwell, et al. 401-02). According to Paul Staudinger, who observed the behavior of royal slaves in the late nineteenth century, they were known to commit acts of violence against free men and to beat them and force them to pay bribes for disagreeing with them or challenging their authority

Such acts were significant in that they served—at least temporarily—to reverse the hierarchy between enslaved and free. Orlando Patterson observes that royal slaves' freedom to operate outside of the traditional social boundaries afforded them a type of liminality that was beneficial both to a royal slave's master and to the community at large. Caste relations were based on the concept of impassable boundaries. Royal slaves, by token of their slavery, were marginal figures and considered socially dead. Further, their royal status made them liable only to the emir. Thus, they could transcend boundaries that other people—both enslaved and free—could not (Stilwell, et al. 402). In effect, their royal connections enabled them to speak directly to the emir on behalf of people who lacked any public voice. Slaves who originally hailed from the region of the Sokoto Caliphate such as Abū Bakr and Muḥammad Kaba were likely familiar with the concept of royal slavery and the benefits that it afforded, may have drawn parallels between the practice in Africa and their own experiences in Jamaica. Abū Bakr's job as a bookkeeper on the Spice Grove Plantation, Muḥammad Kaba's role as a *marabout* of the clandestine Muslim community, and the involvement of both men in the slave rebellion of 1832 demonstrated their ability to operate outside of normal boundaries. Although this

rebellion's immediate consequences included increased cruelty against implicated slaves, its facilitation of the Emancipation Act two years later yielded a tangible benefit for all slaves on the island. It is interesting that, in both West Africa and the West Indies, the liminality afforded certain slaves and its application to the broader benefit of society parallel the traditional character traits and purpose of trickster in both African and African-American folklore (Roberts 29).

Even in the New World, where those at the highest echelons of power tended to be of European rather than African descent, some Africans still exploited others. Evidence of this is found in a letter—taken from the manuscripts of Fray Toribio de Motolinia and inserted into the work of Juan de Torquemada—written by a black slave in Nueva España to a friend who was also a slave on the island of Española. In it, the first slave writes to the second, “Friend, I tell you, this is good land for slaves; here the black has good food, here the black has slave that serves the black, and the slave of the black has Indian servant, which means black or manservant: so work, that your owner will sell you, so that you come to this land, which is the best in the world for blacks” (Saco, *Historia* 55). While this correspondence is somewhat ambiguous regarding the racial identity of a *naborio*—the term used by Saco to refer to an Indian servant in his original Spanish text, it allows for the possibility that he may be African. Moreover, it indicates the existence of multiple levels of slavery, some of which may have been exploited by others who were enslaved themselves. Slave-owning slaves are reported to have existed in other parts of the New World as well. In Diamantina, Brazil, a particular class of urban slaves could own their own slaves (Gates, *Latin* 32). A similar trend occurred in Bahia, Brazil (Reis 121). Since more African slaves were imported to Brazil than to any

other country in the New World, it is possible that the number of slaves involved on both sides of this practice have been severely understated. The fact that it took place in Bahia—a town heavily populated by Muslim slaves—allows for the possibility that many of them may have been Muslims. It also raises the question of whether Muslim slaves here followed the Qur'anic injunction not to enslave their co-religionists.

Another interesting context in which slaves held slaves of their own was the city of Ibadan, located in the Yoruba-speaking region of West Africa. Here privileged slaves could acquire property and purchase their own slaves. Such slaves had their own horses, farms, harems, drummer and fifer. They allegedly were never sold. They remained guardians of the house and of their masters' children. They trained young slaves and recruits for war. They took four fifths of the captives caught from each expedition, while their masters took only one fifth. They acquired slaves through war, and could also purchase slaves. They exercised power both over their own slaves and over those of their masters. They used their own slaves mainly for accumulation. They exploited slaves more than free-born masters for two main reasons. First, most lived extravagantly, and thus needed to maximize their resources. All sources confirm that their excessive dressing habits tended to exceed those of their masters. They wanted additional resources to buy more slaves and further enhance their status. They had a reputation for cruelty to their slaves. Farm supervisors (*olorioko*) who inspected slave labor on farms were usually privileged slaves themselves. Slaves resented the slave supervisors, because they felt like the former had forgotten their origins (Falola 98-99).

Privileged slaves could make money by getting compensation from their masters and taking part of the profit. They also had authority over others. As supervisors, trade

could require them to be outside Ibadan, in which cases they had full authority to discipline others. They also controlled the labor of those under them, which enabled them to make money through trade similar to their masters. These benefits even discouraged some of them from buying their freedom, since doing so would eliminate their economic base and earnings. Some slaves also served as toll-collectors on the staffs of gatekeepers appointed by war chiefs. Toll-collectors were usually slaves, since most free people shied away from the job-related atrocities such as extortion, profanity and harassment of citizens. If a toll-collector were removed due to loss of a war chief's favor, his death or loss of power, the toll-collector would lose his privileges, property, personal slaves, which could be taken by his master. Privileged slaves had some control over soldier slaves. The former served as bodyguards and could receive military titles. In this case, they became instructors of military recruits. Sometimes, they were cruel to new recruits (Falola 100). In the late 1880s, they were even alleged to divert recruits to their own farms, on the claim that it was part of the recruits' training. They also used recruits for raids and could try cases of soldier slaves. Some privileged slaves even were appointed as *ajele*, or governors of colonies. It is said that slaves and non-indigenes of Ibadan made better *ajele*, since their situations promoted a higher degree of fidelity (101). In this regard, they parallel the less abstract rhetorical tropes in that their paucity of connections to networks of power limited their own signifying potential and agency. Their metonymically-oriented liminality granted them a degree of agency in contexts involving both slaves and free people by enhancing their versatility. Yet their metaphorically-oriented lack of connectivity made them more vulnerable

In Ibadan, the use of slaves served as a way to prevent ambitious freemen from gaining "easy access to wealth by diverting other people's labor for their own enterprises" (Falola 97). Slave labor also prevented free laborers from challenging the inherited wealth of war chiefs' heirs (98). By reinforcing two distinct categories of people—enslaved and free—this system emphasized contiguous relationships. Since each of these two categories was viewed in terms of its distinction from the other, differences between subcategories tended to be overlooked. Any unfair disadvantages experienced by free laborers were overshadowed by their official status as free people in a society where large numbers of people were enslaved. In a similar manner, slave-owning slaves, while vulnerable and potentially disadvantaged in different ways, tended to be viewed less critically for exploiting their power over weaker individuals.

3.5 Rhetorical Parallels of Slave-Owning Slaves

Prior to becoming owners themselves, slaves were relegated to the status of a commodity possessed by another. In this manner, they parallel the role of the *nkisi* fetish or hex. Like metonymy, their status as property defines them as a part that represents the greater whole of their owner. Yet any slave's owner, whether enslaved or free himself, corresponds with the trope of *ndoki* as an agent who defines the terms of a relationship between two different entities (Piedra, *Monkey* 374). The owner also corresponds with the Western trope of metaphor as an agent who tries to express himself within an existing hierarchy (White, *Metahistory* 36). Such slaves gradually become defined less in terms of their metonymic relationship with free owners, although this is always a factor. They may now also be defined in terms of a new metonymic relationship with their own slaves.

In addition, they take on more metaphoric attributes, which tend to be less strictly defined, less reductionist, more romanticized, and more self-determining than metonymic terms. In keeping with metaphor, their identity as slaves provides a characterization of the domain of their experience (White, *Tropics* 5). It may also be said to express meaning in terms of equivalence or identity—specifically equivalence or identity with others in the category of slaves. Yet one must also consider what is perhaps metaphor's most obvious function—the expression of similarity in difference, and difference in similarity (72). In general terms, slave-owning slaves are still categorized as slaves—like their fellow, non-slave-owning, bondsmen. Yet unlike the latter, slave-owning slaves are distinguished by their ownership of other humans—some of the very humans with whom they may sometimes be grouped as equals.

By taking ownership of other individuals, however, these slaves—while still commodities—also become owners in whose terms new commodities will be defined. Without losing their prior status as a fetish or *nkisi*, they acquire a new status as a *ndoki* who defines the boundaries of a new relationship. The fact that slave-owning slaves had a reputation for cruelty exceeding that of their free masters confirms that they were aware of their newfound ability to define relationships. While slaves have always influenced the formation of their relationships to a certain degree, those who own other slaves define relationships in an official capacity over subordinates rather than solely in a covert manner against their free masters. The role of slave-owning slaves is all the more enigmatic in that, in some ways, it takes on the role of *nganga* or synecdoche. Like synecdoche, it carries out a formalization of a mode of representation—the hierarchical relationship between one slave and another (White, *Tropics* 73). Hierarchical

relationships—many of them formalized—had long existed between different slaves based on their skills and their assigned tasks. However, such relationships are now defined even more starkly through the dividing line of ownership—a factor that is less fungible than a skill or rank and one that, by its very nature, identifies the agent and the recipient who is acted upon. This type of slave is also like a *nganga* in that he manipulates the already existing fetish to restore the natural order (Piedra, *Monkey* 374).

Free laborers at lower socio-economic levels, most of whom did not own slaves, also have parallels with several tropes. Like free slave owners, laborers ostensibly possessed a degree of agency over their own lives. In keeping with the trope of metaphor, they tried to more fully realize this agency through the practice of their labor for socio-economic gain. Similar to *ndoki*, free laborers attempted to express themselves within an existing paradigm (White, *Metahistory* 36). Unlike *ndoki*, however, free laborers were not highly successful at altering the natural order through the creation of fetishes. The fetishes that they sought to create were their labor and the goods and services that resulted from it. Yet their ability to provide these was jeopardized by the free labor of slaves that rendered their own paid labor less desirable.

Similar to *nkisi*, free laborers constituted positive but passive links with tradition. Nonetheless, their status as *nkisis* in their own right was uncertain. They may once have constituted fetishes due to their ability to perform labor, but the introduction of free slave labor as a cheaper substitute diminished their power. While some of them may have been optimistic that their labor would eventually yield them a higher standard of living, and that—in keeping with the tropes of synecdoche and *nganga*—the natural order of an economy dependent on paid labor would be reinstated, the likelihood of this was

diminished by the presence of slaves. While such laborers had more ostensible freedom than slaves, their agency in a slaveholding society was diminished as a result of their reduced demand as a labor source. In a way, free laborers' inhibited experience as a result of slavery's introduction parallels the de-animation of a *nkisi* fetish. Like fetishes that could be disassembled only after their owners died, free laborers' non-fetish status was due primarily to their freedom (Palmié 864). In contrast to free laborers, all slaves maintained the status of a fetish, due to their desirability as unpaid, owned workers. Yet in many cases, this status granted them no tangible agency. Thus, the majority of slaves paralleled de-animated *nkisis*—a status in keeping with the existing perception of slaves as dead or soulless beings. Some slaves, however, achieved and maintained agency to the extent that they could reshape their situations and reverse the relationships between themselves and others. This was particularly true among slave-owning slaves, who wielded power and ownership over others in spite of their official marginalization and perceived de-animation. Because of this, slave-owning slaves manifested *simbi* and irony more deeply than any other tropes.

Regarding slave-owning slaves in the military and government, Paul Lovejoy observes that in unstable political situations or times of economic transition, enterprising individuals who were protected by wealthy and powerful people could exploit opportunities to improve their status (Lovejoy, *Transformations* 161). While slaves' acquisition of power, wealth, or other slaves was not restricted to those with military and political connections or to periods of wartime, it was facilitated by such conditions. Periods of broad change made changes on individual levels easier and, in some cases, less noticeable. In keeping with the Yoruba trope *simbi*, such conditions could serve as

harbingers that traditional relationships were being challenged (Piedra, *Monkey* 375). Reminiscent of the ironic narrative paradigm, they refute previously held beliefs that any one narrative paradigm (metaphoric, metonymic, or synecdochic) is sufficient to reflect the reality of a given field (White, *Tropics* 6).

In the United States—and conceivably in Africa and the Caribbean as well—an important strategy used by masters for facilitating relations with slaves was to grant the latter increased responsibility for managing their own behavior. One key figure who served this purpose was the black slave driver who worked under the master or overseer. Slave drivers, who were usually slaves themselves, were expected communicate whatever they deemed necessary to the master. Since this responsibility allowed them to exploit their communication for the benefit of themselves or other slaves, they effectively acquired a type of liminality. While still enslaved, they were granted a degree of confidence by their masters that allowed their discursive agency to transcend the formal boundary between enslaved and free. Even farms without officially designated drivers still relied on slave leaders, whose positions of trust allowed them a closer audience with their masters (Roberts 49). It is reasonable to assume that in all areas where Africans were enslaved, similar types of power relationship existed and were exploited for the benefit of slave communities. In effect, they provided opportunities for communication between slaves and their masters in which the former functioned as authors, narrators, and editors of oral messages rather than merely as recipients.

3.6 Syncretism Between Islamic and Yoruba Traditions in Africa

The Yoruba have had a significant presence in the Americas since at least the early seventeenth century. Their numbers increased in the eighteenth century, and even more so in the nineteenth century, at which time they represented the single most important ethno-linguistic group from the Bight of Benin (Falola and Childs 40). Yorubaland is positioned between the southern Nigerian border and the Weme River. It also reaches the Atakpame region (112). In spite of its significance, the concept of "Yoruba" is somewhat ambiguous—a fact which complicates the substantiation of its alleged cultural importance. One reason for this ambiguity is that its connotations transcend purely racial boundaries to take on linguistic and cultural meanings. The term "Yoruba" may refer to speakers of the Yoruba language, or to those who associate themselves with the Yoruba culture group (40). Yoruba have long identified themselves—and been identified by others—as Lucumí and Nagô since as early as the sixteenth century. A common language helped to foster a collective identity (7). Of those who were called Nagô, Lucumí or Yoruba, it is reasonable to assume that not all spoke Yoruba as their first language. Some had multiple ethnic identities and spoke multiple languages (42).

While Islam was but one of several influences within the broader sphere of the Yoruba, it contributed to their collective identity. Islam and the Yoruba culture have long had connections in both Africa and the Americas. The spread of Islam in Yoruba kingdoms dates back to at least the sixteenth century. Yet Arabic writing first developed in the early nineteenth century and was closely tied to the *jihad* movement in northern Yorubaland. The Islamic Emirate of Ilorin in which the community of Islamic scholars

was centered eventually became part of the Sokoto Empire. Ilorin included people of Fulani, Hausa, Nupe, Kanuri, Dendi/Songhai, and Arab origin. The number of Yoruba scholars in the group gradually increased along with the general process of Yorubization of the town of Ilorin. Ilorin became the cultural center for Yoruba Muslims (Na'Allah, *African* 44).

3.7 Syncretism Between Islamic and Yoruba Traditions in the Caribbean

Once in Cuba, Yoruba captives were often identified by ethnic subgroup. These included Lucumí-Adó, Lucumí-Oyo, Lucumí-Egbá, Lucumí-Yebú among others. Sometimes, a person's ethnicity was used as a surname, as in the case of Santiago Lucumí (Falola and Childs 115). Ethnicities were also reflected in the names of Yoruba mutual aid societies such as Lucumí Ello and Lucumí Aguzá, or with Catholic saints, like the Lucumí cabildos San Pedro Nolsaco, Nuestra Señora del Rosario, and Señora de las Nieves (114-16). José Antonio Aponte, who was accused of leading the rebellion to overthrow the government in 1812, was the leader of the Shangó Tedum cabildo, a well-known practitioner of Lucumí, and member of the Ogboni, a powerful secret society based in Yorubaland. Lucumís were also among those sentenced in 1844 for the Ladder Conspiracy (116). Of the 250 slaves and free black defendants charged after the Muslim Revolt in Bahia in 1835, 196 (78.4%) were Nagô (Yoruba); 32 (12.4%) were Hausa; 10 (4.0%) were Jeje (Ewe-Fon); 7 (2.8%) were Borno; 6 (2.4%) were Tapa (Nupe) (46). People who identified themselves as Yoruba in the nineteenth century included Muslims and Christians, in addition to those who consulted the orisha (Falola and Childs 42-43). Babalawos have sometimes been consulted by people who are not nominal followers of

the Yoruba religion. Some Western-educated Christians and Muslims of Yoruba ancestry and cultural affiliation have secretly consulted Babalawos for advice (Qlatunji 110). In a related vein, many Yoruba proverbs are of Muslim or Christian origin (169).

Another key example of syncretism between Muslim and Yoruba cultures in the Caribbean is the widespread use of the *gris-gris*—an amulet containing Qur'anic inscriptions and believed to render its wearer invulnerable (Diouf 128-29). Most amulets used by slaves were made in the Americas, but many were brought from Africa as well. Although slaves were shipped naked, they were allowed to keep small items such as jewelry. *Gris-gris* were often sewn into small leather pouches that hung close to the neck or groin (130). Due to their association with occult sciences such as numerology, astrology, and astronomy, some Muslim scholars have considered them to be acts of unbelief. Nevertheless, they have been popular among both Muslims and non-Muslims. Since the power associated with written passages from the Qur'an was attributed to the symbolism of a connection with a divinity, *gris-gris* allowed Muslim clerics in Africa to gain powerful influence over animist or fetishist leaders (129).

3.8 Syncretism Between Islamic and Yoruba Traditions in the Ottoman Empire

Syncretism between Islam and the Yoruba culture and religion may be found even in Africa and the Middle East, some of whose regions are marked by a Muslim predominance. In the Ottoman Empire, lodges founded to house and protect escaped slaves were each led by a freed female African slave called a *kolbaşı*, *godya*, or *godiya*. If slaves were unsuccessful in seeking redress directly from their owners, then they often sought redress through a deity. *Kolbaşis* would intervene on behalf of slaves for this

purpose. According to Toledano, imams and Sufi sheikhs were known to perform this function as well (Toledano, *Silent* 119). In addition to functioning as union leaders, *kolbaşis* served as priestesses of religious cults that worshipped a deity called *Yavroubé* or *Yarrabox*. This deity also had a Turkicized name, *YavraBey*, which means “infant lord” (207). A variety of explanations have been proposed for the etymology of these terms. Hakam Erdem believed that observers of this religion rendered the pronunciation *Yavroubé* based on their mispronunciation of the Turkish *YavruBey* “Infant God”. However, Toledano suggests that this is more likely the title of a high-ranking Ottoman military office or aide-de-camp, which should be pronounced in Arabic dialects of Egypt and Sudan as *Yawer* or *YawraBey* (224).

Another example of syncretism between Islam and the cult of *Yavroubé* are the Zar and Bori cults. These practices, found in both the Ottoman Empire and Egypt, predicated upon local interpretations of Islam. A key form of this is the spiritual-mystical-experiential spaces created by Sufi orders. This occurred in both rural and urban environments and provided the principal understanding of Islam for the vast majority of people (Toledano, *Silent* 217). Although Zar rituals were not ostensibly Islamic, they resembled *zikr* rituals among the Islamic Qadiriyya and Khatimiyya orders of Sudan. Sufi *zikrs* have elements of healing and trance; yet their main purpose is to achieve a closer relationship with God in an Islamic framework. Zar contains elements of healing and trance also. Yet both it and Bori are primarily possession cults, whereas *zikr* is mainly a trance ritual. Zar can exist without Islamic elements, but the Sufi *zikr* cannot. Another noteworthy difference is that Zar-Bori leads to individual trance, whereas *zikr* leads to a collective trance among participants. The collective trance is

considered a higher achievement, and mostly done by men (Toledano, *Silent* 218-19). Zar was a key aspect of enslaved culture that intersected with vernacular forms of Islam in the Ottoman realm. Bori is a spirit-possession cult of the Maguzawa, a Hausa group with pre-Islamic origins that was resistant to religious integration (220). Zar was more common among enslaved women than enslaved men. This was partly because women constituted the overwhelming majority of slaves in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. Also, the main socio-cultural factor in possession, as described by I. M. Lewis, was “the experience of identity-threatening stress, exacerbated by conditions of confinement and exclusion.” Enslaved women had a greater tendency to fit this model than enslaved men and, thus, more greatly desired the emotional escape provided by the Zar-Bori rituals (222).

The Zar and Bori rituals have other similarities with Islamic practices. Prior to a Zar ritual, participants perform ablutions, as do Muslims before prayer. The Zar healing priestess or *kudya*, who led the ritual, was normally required to be a *hajja*—one who had performed pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina. This status and her proficiency in popular religious talk gave her the appearance of a devout Muslim. After the first stage of dancing and trance, the *kudya* would calm the participants and then lead them through a recitation of the *fatiha* or opening chapter of the Qur'an. The *fatiha* was repeated throughout the ceremony to honor different Islamic personages such as the Prophet Muḥammad, his family, various leading and local Sufi saints, and other public figures. The mixture of Islamic elements in the Zar-Bori ritual is reminiscent of the Afro-Catholic syncretism in seventeenth-century Cartagena de las Indias, where prayer components were included in healing practices (Toledano, *Silent* 223). In such ceremonies, the

invocation of the *fatiha* was followed by the playing of instruments, which served to placate the possessing spirits (Toledano, *Silent* 224). According to one source, *Yaver Bey* demands green clothes, since green is the color of Islam. However, it is not clear if the deity is influenced in other ways by Islamic concepts. Through the spread of the Yaver Bey ritual in Ottoman Egyptian Sudan and the Ottoman heartland, the Ottoman Zar became a major Zar spirit, found in most African-Ottoman cult rituals. Also, a creolized localized form of Zar drawn from both Islamic and Ottoman traditions could be found at different socio-economic echelons throughout the Ottoman Empire (225).

Another potential connection between the two cultures is reflected in the claim that the word “Yoruba” is of Muslim origin (Falola and Childs 7). The reasons for the Yoruba's choice of a Muslim word to identify their community are unknown (41). Yet, there may be a connection with the Yaver Bey ritual. Two variant pronunciations for the name of the ritual and its deity—*Yavroubé* or *Yarrabox*—are similar in appearance to the word “Yoruba.” The Turkish expression *YavruBey*, meaning “Infant God,” may reflect another connection. The juxtaposition of the two terms “infant” and “god” is reminiscent of the alternative portrayals of the Yoruba trickster Esu as either a young child or an old man. While such descriptions seem contradictory, they describe states that Esu occupies at different times; thus, they represent different aspects of his totality. When placed together in the phrase “Infant God,” the two words form a metonymic sequence reminiscent of the bipartite Odu names in the Yoruba tradition. Like a metonym, this name reflects a contiguous relationship in which either word may be perceived as a part that represents the whole. Like a synecdoche, the name is representational, synthetic in its incorporation of seemingly contradictory components, and optimistic in its outlook. It

also shows an awareness of reversibility, in that either aspect of the deity's identity as an infant god may overshadow the other (White, *Tropics* 73). The name may also be said to contain implications of the other two master tropes—metaphor and irony. "Infant" reflects a state of metaphoric innocence while "god" reflects a self-aware, all-knowing, totality—more commonly associated with the trope of irony. Together, the two terms may represent the full range of consciousness from the complete innocence to omniscience.

Another possible explanation—unrelated to the Turkish expression *YavruBey*—is the similarity between the word "Yoruba" and the Arabic word, *wa-ra-ba*, which means to equivocate, dupe, or outsmart ("wa-ra-ba"). Given the centrality of the figure Esu and the master tropes—*ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi*—in the Yoruba cosmology and popular expression, as well as their connections with the theme of trickery, it is possible that Arabic-speaking people referred to the Yoruba with a name that would underscore this trait. The simultaneous correctness of this suggestion and the suggestion in the previous paragraph may seem unlikely. Yet it is conceivable if Yoruba who were enslaved by the Ottomans took the name previously given to them by Arabs and altered its pronunciation to approximate a phrase in the language of their Ottoman conquerors. This would facilitate their continued secret worship of their own deity under the guise of assimilation to the master code. If so, the meaning "infant god" of the Turkish phrase *YavruBey* would be both coincidental and convenient. It would make the process of assimilation more palatable for followers of the Yoruba religion, by providing a tangible, overt symbol of their religious and cultural survival. It is said that a popular method of deception among the Yoruba is to say the words of one sentence while using the tones of

another sentence (Farrow 2). Such a strategy would be in keeping with the aforementioned hypothesis of feigning cultural assimilation while subtly promoting deviation or rebellion.

3.9 Enhancing the Credibility of Abū Bakr's Account

For Abū Bakr's narrative to move readers in a way that would bring about his and other slaves' manumission, it was important to provide an appearance of authenticity. A key challenge in this regard was the existence of three somewhat contradictory English translations. While G. C. Renouard, the translator of the second and third versions, believed that all three versions contained the same information, differences do exist in spelling, content, and stylistic elements. The first version was delivered in writing to Dr. Richard Robert Madden in Jamaica in 1834, prior to Abū Bakr's manumission. However, Abū Bakr provided an oral translation and it is believed that Madden received further assistance in preparing a written document in English (Renouard 102, Wilks 156). This version was included in Madden's memoirs, *A Twelvemonths Residence in the West Indies*. It was later rediscovered by Dr. Charles Wesley in an office at the anti-slavery society in London (Wesley 52). The second and third versions were written in Arabic by Abū Bakr—the second in London and the third, which is no longer extant, on a ship between the West Indies and England. Some scholars may attribute more credibility to Madden's translation, based on his collaboration with the original author. However, the second version—translated in London by G. C. Renouard, and included in Philip Curtin's book, *Africa Remembered: Narrative by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*—

is the most comprehensive, contains the fewest irregularities in spelling and grammar, and was made by a more knowledgeable scholar of Arabic (Renouard 102, Wilks 156).

Complicating matters further are various discrepancies between the facsimile of Renouard's translation in the article which he published in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* in 1836 and the transcription of his translation published by Wilks in 1967 (Renouard 100, Wilks 157). The 1836 version, while identical to the version in Wilks' chapter in terms of format, topics, and comprehensiveness, differs in its transliteration of non-English names, both of people and of locations. These differences raise the question of whether Wilks tried to standardize the spellings in accordance with contemporary English orthographical rules to make his own publication of the narrative more acceptable. While the version of Madden's translation that was discovered by Wesley and published in the *Journal of Negro History* in 1936 is very similar to the version included in Madden's memoirs, it is not identical—a fact which increases the number of versions from three to four. The version of Renouard's translation included in Wilks' chapter is that which I will refer to throughout the dissertation unless otherwise indicated. In quotations from Wilks' chapter, bracketed quotations preceded by the letter "B" are quotations from Madden's translation which provide supplementary information not found in the translation of Renouard.

The perspective of the narrator is an important factor. While a first-person perspective is often thought to enhance a text's credibility by implying its authenticity via eyewitness testimony, it nevertheless serves as a subjectifying lens through which the events of one's life are observed and later retold. According to White, references to the first-person perspective contribute to a text's subjectivity. A discourse's subjectivity is

made evident by the presence—explicit or implicit—of an "ego" that functions as the sole person to maintain the discourse. Conversely, the objectivity of a narrative may be defined as the absence of any reference to the narrator (White, *Content* 3). Almost all of Abū Bakr's text is construed as a first-person narrative, in which Abū Bakr refers to himself using the personal pronoun "I." There are only two ruptures in the narration in which declarative verbs introduce quotations of other characters' speech. The first of these is the statement made by Abū Bakr's instructor of the Qur'an regarding his willingness to accompany Abū Bakr to the city of Bouna. The second example is found in the instructions given by Sultan Adinkra to his deputy regarding the demands for a ransom to be relayed to the Sultan of Bouna. According to Meike Bal, the use of such declarative verbs indicates a change in narrative level (Bal 44). The mixture of narrative levels created by such a change leads to textual interference, which is sign of fictionality (46-47). It is possible that the paucity of declarative verbs serves to diminish the aura of fictionality and, thus, to enhance the credibility of the account. Since the use of declarative verbs marks a shift in narrative level, it increases a reader's awareness of the narrator's presence. There are no direct references to the narrator in Abū Bakr's account, aside from the occasional use of first-person pronouns; thus, the appearance of the account's objectivity is heightened, based on the principle stated by White.

Other strategies aimed to enhance the aura of the text's objectivity involve devices at the textual level utilized by the narrator, and devices at the metatextual level used by the editors-cum-translators Madden, Renouard, Wesley and Wilks. One such textual device is Abū Bakr's summary of key rules of his Islamic faith, such as limits on wives, prohibition of intoxicating drinks, pork, and any animal slain in an inappropriate

manner (Wilks 162-63). These details may serve as rhetorical devices aimed to enhance his credibility by presenting him as a pious Muslim (Renouard 106). Metatextual devices are evident in Renouard's article that contains both his translation of Abū Bakr's narrative and his own commentary on it. Published in the *Royal Geographical Society of London* in 1836, this article is metatextual, both in its treatment of the narrative and of the prior intervention by Madden (Renouard 100). To strengthen Abū Bakr's credibility, Renouard employs not only his own first hand observation, but also the testimonies of others. One of these is an English traveler, Mr. Davidson, who visited Morocco and met people there who corroborated aspects of Abū Bakr's narrative pertaining to his travels in Africa (108). Some topics in Renouard's commentary do not confirm the veracity of Abū Bakr's account so much as enhance his credibility as a literate and honest person possessing a familiarity with the African continent. Renouard himself confirmed Abū Bakr's proficiency in Arabic as sufficient to prove the veracity of his statements. In a tribute to Abū Bakr's diligence in preserving his fluency and to the fortitude of his memory, Renouard mentions that he had to wait for two years after his arrival in Jamaica before obtaining pen, ink and paper. Further, he allegedly had only two or three other Africans with whom he could practice his language skills (109). Renouard vouches for Abū Bakr's ability to read portions of both the Old and New Testaments in Arabic. He also refers to Abū Bakr's recognition of streets in Kumásí, which were depicted on plates in the publication by a Mr. Bowdich, his recognition of magical ceremonies of the Ashantí soothsayers, and his familiarity with the passage of the Basomprá in the book by a Mr. Dupuis. Abū Bakr proceeded to identify the names of many kings and chiefs listed in these two books. He recognized animals from Africa and showed a knowledge of

plants and seeds, most of which were not found in the West Indies. He demonstrated a knowledge of the Qur'an, which included references to the Egyptian pharaoh as well as the ability to locate passages in Arabic based on requests made in English. He was also said to have chanted the Muslim call to prayer with proper pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm. Although he had allegedly not yet studied commentaries on the Qur'an, he supposedly knew the names of the most famous commentators (Renouard 109-10). He also provided a description of the routes that he had taken and the location of the towns that he visited in Africa which convinced listeners of its validity as a text and his credibility as a source (110-12).

Linguistic heteroglossia is another important aspect of Abū Bakr's text that, surprisingly, may enhance its aura of authenticity and credibility. Perhaps the most rudimentary example of heteroglossia is the narrative's composition in Arabic, which was not Abū Bakr's native language. He had studied Arabic as a religious language and made attempts to maintain his skill, both during the trans-Atlantic passage and in Jamaica. However, his limited opportunities to practice it during his captivity led to a gradual loss of proficiency. Madden comments on this tendency in his memoirs, indicating that Abū Bakr's scholarly achievements were unusual among his countrymen, at least in terms of their preservation during slavery (Madden, *West Indies* 125). This, coupled with two levels of language interference—first from his native language in the initial process of composition, and then from English as a result of its translation, led to incongruities in the published versions. These include errors in orthography, grammar, syntax, and a simplified vocabulary. To a certain degree, these idiosyncrasies were glossed over in the English translations. Yet the most noticeable result is that the range of vocabulary, the

syntactical variation, and use of figurative language are all diminished. In effect, Abū Bakr's narrative appears simpler than both *Autobiografía de un esclavo* and *Biografía de un cimarrón*.

While the uncomplicated appearance of the narrative may be partly due to the linguistic limitations of Abū Bakr and his translators, another possibility is that it was deliberately composed in a simple style in order to obtain the good will of the reader. This strategy was used by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas in his essay *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, where it also served to persuade the reader of the injustices committed against the Indians by the Spanish. In the sixteenth century when las Casas wrote, the authorial goals of eloquence and fame were considered antithetical to the concept of "true history." Consequently, they were avoided in order to enhance texts' perceived authenticity. The resurgence of this critical approach in the nineteenth century makes its application to Abū Bakr's narrative plausible. Also relevant to the appearance of las Casas' text was the Amerindian model of simplicity and humility, which las Casas sought to mirror in his writing style (Camacho, *Meta-historia* 41). A similar stylistic mimesis may have been a goal of both Abū Bakr's composition and Madden's and Renouard's translations, since it corresponds with the expectations of a text written by a slave and, in doing so, increases its potential to persuade and garner sympathy.

Even if this strategy was implemented, a further uncertainty would be Abū Bakr's cognizance of it. What is undoubtedly true is that the text's simplicity gives it a more metaphoric appearance. Apart from allusions to important individuals, families, and cities in the protagonist's life, the narrative is largely devoid of intertextual references. While it provides extensive detail about the protagonist's ancestry and the travels

undertaken by himself and his father, it does not generalize this information categorically or reflect on it analytically, as more abstract rhetorical approaches would tend to do. These aspects, along with its uncomplicated narrative structure, give it the appearance of an ethnographic relic, exotic in its simplicity and brevity. In this respect, it is similar to many of the shorter slave narratives such as those of Nicholas Saïd, Omar bin Saïd, Ayuba Suleiman, Olaudah Equiano, and Şālih Bilālī. While its minimalistic appearance may make it less impressive than longer, more complex, or more rhetorically abstract texts, its metaphoric, rudimentary appearance is crucial in maintaining its aura of authenticity as well as the guise of its protagonist's innocence.

3.10 The Transformative Function of Abū Bakr's Account

“Routes in North Africa by Abū Bekr eṣ ṣiddīk” [sic] may be labeled a transformative text in terms of the experience that it narrates, its representation of this experience, and the effect that it renders on its protagonist's image. While there is not known to be any falsification of facts, the fashion in which the facts are presented and the goal to which their author aspires are both inherently transformative. A key element of this transformation, which also relates to the autobiographical and testimonial genres, is rememoration. Rememoration is the process of stating anew that which has already been remembered. Yet the authenticity of memory diminishes over time and its content is refashioned. This refashioning is influenced by a variety of factors including the time which transpires between the observation of the event and its rememoration, the historical milieu, and the personal experiences of the memory holder. It is also related to the concept of testimony. “Testimony” is derived from the Greek word “martyr,” meaning

“that which gives faith to something.” It implies that the bearer of testimony was alive or present for the act in question. In Greek, however, “martyr” did not connote suffering or sacrifice. In Latin, particularly in the Christian era, “martyr” acquired its currently predominant meaning of one who offers a testimony of faith and is willing to make a sacrifice for it. It can also refer to exemplary conduct. Thus, the narration of a martyr’s life may take on an exemplary or moralizing function (Achugar 61).

Details about Abū Bakr’s own travels and enslavement correspond with the original ‘Greek’ meaning of “martyr” of one who gives faith to something based on direct observation. However, most of the information in his narrative does not correspond with the Greek meaning, since it is not based on his own first-hand observation. Instead, it is transferred to him by other sources and its topics include his genealogy, the pedigree of his teachers, and the personal experiences of his father, all of which are typical subjects of Arabic biography. By functioning as a medium through which portions of the text pass, rather than as their creator, he lengthens the process of textual manipulation and confirms his complicity in it. The use of mnemonic lineage through references to teachers and ancestors underscores the collective—and, thus, manipulative—nature of these memories. It also sheds light on the fact that, through remembrance, this information ceases to constitute a memory of the ancestors’ experiences and instead becomes a memory of the act of linguistic transmission (Molloy, *Face* 160-61).

The references to Abū Bakr’s education and family genealogy are aimed at enhancing his image in the view of this audience. In doing so, they correspond more closely with the Latin adaptation of the meaning of “martyr,” which connotes exemplary conduct and sacrifice. The final portion of the narrative, which refers to Abū Bakr’s

suffering and faith, further reiterates his status as a martyr. This relates to the Greek meaning, through Abū Bakr's first-hand knowledge of what he expresses, and to the Latin meaning, due to its moral implications. Since people of African descent were looked down upon by members of the white ruling class, the treatment of all of these topics serves to craft Abū Bakr's image as a noble savage, who might be considered more deserving of preferential treatment or even manumission. While connotations of sacrifice and martyrdom may be present in the final portion of the narrative that describes his enslavement, the first section of the narrative utilizes remembrance to enhance the image of Abū Bakr's genealogical and educational pedigrees.

In Islamic communities, educational pedigree is often used to establish a person's reputation. Some cities, due to their fame as centers of learning, could be cited for this purpose. For this reason, Abū Bakr begins his narrative with the identification of Timbuktu as his birthplace. While little background is provided on Timbuktu in the narrative, it carries a symbolic value as a center of Islamic jurisprudence and the alleged location of the world's first university (Afroz, *Jihad* 230). Another type of educational credential in West Africa may be established through a chain of scholar-teachers. When such a list is written out, it constitutes a form of metonymy, in a manner reminiscent of ancestral name lineages. For this reason, Abū Bakr provides a synopsis of his educational attainments and a list of his instructors in Qur'anic reading, recitation, and interpretation. He also mentions their places of origin, and concludes by emphasizing the role of the chief teacher:

This was done in the city of Bouna, where there are many learned men [*'ulamā'*], who are not natives of one place, but each of them having quitted his own country, has come and settled there. The names of these *sayyids* [masters] who dwelt in the city of Bouna are as follows: 'Abdallāh ibn al-Ḥājj; Muḥammad

Watarāwī; Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā; Fatik al-Abyaḍ; [the white man]; Skaykh 'Abd al-Qādir Sankari, from the land of Futa Jallon; Ibrāhīm ibn Yūsuf, from the land of Futa Toro; Ibrāhīm ibn Abī 'l-Hasan from Silla by descent, but born at Dyara. These men used to meet together to hear the instructions of 'Abdallāh ibn al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Tafsīr. (Wilks 157)

During Abū Bakr's life, Bouna was a famous center of Muslim learning and the two references to it in this passage likely serve to reiterate its association with him and his teachers and, thus, enhance their prestige. Two other locations mentioned—Futa Toro and Futa Jallon—played important roles in the Muslim reform movement in the Western Sudan. "Silla" likely refers to the prominent Diawara clerical lineage, while "Watarāwī" refers to a Dyula and Mande lineage (157). In doing so, they both constitute synecdoche through their function as parts that represent the unwritten wholes of lineages. In keeping with the diachronic tendencies of both metonymy and synecdoche, such educational lineages convey an already-completed unfolding of events through the chain of learning to which they allude. In a similar manner, the lineages used by Abū Bakr are both metonymic—in their implications of contiguity and causality—and synecdochic—in their classification of individuals into familial or educational groups (Burke 57; White, *Metahistory* 89).

The names of the other four teachers, which are not followed by places of origin, all contain words of symbolic value referring either to personal accomplishment or ethnicity. While there is no explicit mention of physical appearance, there are subtle references to the physical traits of both Abū Bakr's ancestors and his teachers. The most directly relevant of these to Abū Bakr is the use of the title "watarāwī" in his father's name. Since "watarāwī" is a Mande lineage name, one could infer that his father—and Abū Bakr himself—bore the reddish-brown skin color commonly associated with

Mandingos (Wilks 157). Such an association would have been advantageous to Abū Bakr in Caribbean slave communities, due the Mandingos' association with lighter skin color, diligent work ethic, and Islam.

While the Mandingos are one group associated with Abū Bakr, the Fulbe—or Foulah—are also important. William Brown Hodgson identifies the Fulbe as the preeminent group in the Sudan (Hodgson, *Foulah* 2). He mentions four principle Fulbe states—Futa Toro, Futa Boudou, Futa Jallon and Fouladou—two of which are listed by Abū Bakr as the origins of scholars who educated him (Hodgson, *Foulah* 3; Wilks 157). One of these scholars is 'Abd al-Qādir Sankari from the region of Futa Jallon and the other is Ibrāhīm ibn Yūsuf from the region of Futa Toro. 'Abd al-Qādir Sankari further confirms his Fulbe association by using a variation of the Fulbe name "Sangare." Another scholar in the group, "Fatik al-Abyaḍ," uses the title "al-Abyaḍ," whose meaning in Arabic, "the white" or "the white man" (Wilks 157) is included in the text and serves to elevate his status. Since white is one of several colors used by Hodgson to describe the Fulbe, it is possible that this scholar is a member of the same group as his two aforementioned colleagues (Hodgson, *Foulah* 5). His choice of epithet also reflects the association common throughout the Western Sudan—of elevated social status with lighter skin, for which whiteness represented the abstract ideal (6). Hodgson comments on this phenomenon, pointing out that Foulah from every region claimed to be white, ranked themselves among the white nations, and saw themselves as superior to the blacks among whom they lived (5-6). The Fulbe are not the only ones who attest to their whiteness; European and North American scholars do so as well. Major Rennell, a famous geographer, who claims in his appendix to a book on Mungo Park's travels that

the Foulahs "appear clearly to be the Leucæthiopes of Ptolemy and Pliny" (Hodgson, *Notes* 16). A Wesleyan missionary, the Reverend Mr. Macbair, reiterates this idea in his own book and carries it further, saying: "They are certainly white Æthiopians or negroes, compared with the Sudanic tribes surrounding them" (16-17).

The implications of these names in Abū Bakr's historical context in regard to skin color and education would increase the likelihood of his perception as a noble savage. The topics of skin color and educational lineage are addressed in all four versions of the account and—aside from the omission of two instructors' names from the versions of Madden and Wesley—are described in a uniform fashion. The emphasis on light skin color and education is also reminiscent of Madden's description of Juan Francisco Manzano in *Autobiografía de un esclavo*. Madden was undoubtedly aware that Muslims were viewed favorably in comparison to other slaves (Gomez 71). They were generally distinguished from followers of other religions by their literacy in Arabic and were often assigned more highly respected and less physically demanding tasks, based on the assumption of their superior intelligence (84). Given Abū Bakr's awareness that these issues influenced social status both in Africa and in the West Indies, it is reasonable to assume that he composed these details himself.

Abū Bakr's family history, which consists of both genealogical summaries and events in the life of his grandfather and father, constitutes approximately one third of the written text. In it, there are very few direct references to Abū Bakr. Here, the de-emphasis of his own character in favor of a focus on his family and teachers constitutes a metonymic portrayal of him as part of a larger whole. One example of this is the second paragraph of the text, which describes his relatives in earlier generations:

My father's name was Kara Mūsā the Sharīf ("of a noble tribe"), Watarāwī, *Tafsīr*. His brothers were named Idrīs, 'Abd ar-Rahmān Mahmūd, and Abū Bakr. Their father, my grandfather, was *Mār, al-qā'id*, 'Umar ibn Shahīd al-Malik [son of the King's witness or chief law officer]; he lived in the cities of Timbuktu and Jenne. He was also called ibn Abū Ibrāhīm, because Ibrāhīm (may his grave be visited!) was of this country. [B: Some say he was the son of Ibrāhīm, the founder of my race in the country of Jenne.] He [Kara Mūsā] was their father's first-born, and for that reason I was called by the name of his brother, Abū Bakr. (Wilks 157-58)

This paragraph serves to enhance the status of his family by alluding to religious and social distinctions. The first two examples of this are done through the name of Abū Bakr's father. The first example, "sharīf," is an honorific title which denotes lineage from the Prophet Muḥammad. Abū Bakr's family belonged to one of several "shurufā" clans in Timbuktu that claimed to be descended from the Prophet Muḥammad and, consequently, enjoyed a level of prestige (Afroz, *Jihad* 230). The second example, "*Tafsīr*," is a grammatically incorrect version—common in West Africa—of the word "*mufassir*," which indicates that a person is knowledgeable in Qur'anic exegesis (Wilks 152). Given the elevated status of Muslims in Caribbean slave communities, both of these distinctions would have further enhanced Abū Bakr's status.

Other examples allude to his grandfather and great grandfather. The title that Abū Bakr uses to refer to his grandfather, "*Mār, al-qā'id*," is usually taken to mean "*amīr*" or "ruler" in Western Sudan and, thus, suggests a degree of power. The second title, "ibn Shahīd al-Malik," whose English translation is provided in the narrative, enhances the grandfather's status metonymically by expressing two contiguous relationships. In the first, the grandfather functions as a part who represents a whole—the great grandfather—by the use of a name expressing a biological relationship. In the second, the great grandfather functions as a part who serves as the legal representative of his country's

sovereign. Abū Bakr alludes to two of the cities where his grandfather lived, since these were both important centers of learning. He also highlights his grandfather's relation to the alleged founder of his race in the country of Jenne.

With a similar goal, Abū Bakr provides a description of his mother's family:

My mother's name was Nāghōdī, that is, in the Hausa tongue; but her real name was Ḥafṣah. Her brothers were named 'Abdallah Tafsīr aṣ-Ṣifā [the purified], Ya'qūb, Yaḥyā, Sa'ad, Ḥāmid Bābā, Mū'min, 'Uthmān, and 'Abd al-Karīm. Her sisters were Ḥabībah, Fāṭimah, Maryam, and Maimunah. Their father was named al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Tafsīr, of the cities of Katsina and Bornu (Wilks 159-60).

Some of the same honorific titles are used on the mother's side of the family. "*Tafsīr*," which was already mentioned once with reference to the paternal ancestors, is used two more times for the maternal ancestors. The title "*aṣ-Ṣifa*," meaning "the purified" is used to refer to one of Abū Bakr's uncles and "*al-Ḥājj*," which indicates the completion of a pilgrimage to Mecca, is used to refer to his father. Many of the personal names mentioned here refer to important figures in the Qur'an. These include Ya'qub, Yahya, Ḥafṣah, 'Uthmān, Ḥabībah, Fāṭimah, Maryam, Maīmūnah, and Muḥammad. Further, names such as 'Abdallah and 'Abd al-Karīm, which may be translated "slave of Allah" and "slave of the noble" respectively, enhance the sense of Muslim piety. Since the Arabic word for *karīm* is one of the ninety-nine names of Allah and refers to an attribute of Allah, both names serve to underscore the Muslim faith of his mother's relatives.

Once he has established his family's status, Abū Bakr narrates his father's travels. The narrative style used for this provides an important reflection both of the role of slavery in the historical context and of Abū Bakr's perception of it. To begin with, the preparations for his travels were carried out almost entirely by slaves. The section about his travels is initiated with statements to this effect: "He then ordered his slaves to make

ready for their departure with him to visit his brothers, and see whether they were in health or not. They therefore obeyed their master's orders and did so" (Wilks 159). Most of the events narrated in his travels—and the entire section about his stay in Bouna—refer to activities done not by himself, but by his slaves. In every sentence of this passage, the slaves are the active subject. Abū Bakr's father is mentioned only three times, each of which refers either to his giving an order or being obeyed. This series of clauses, which refer alternately to the father's commands and the slaves' execution of them, reflects the master-slave binary in the West-African social hierarchy. One may see from this description that prior to Abū Bakr's own enslavement, he was familiar with the institution of slavery. Moreover, he seems to approve of it, since he describes the slaves' activities and their interaction with their master in a non-judgmental manner.

While Abū Bakr's neutral discussion of slavery here may appear surprising when contrasted with his negative portrayal of his own enslavement, it reflects that slavery was common throughout Africa and that many people were involved as both captors and captives. Since many of the wars fought in Africa were essentially slaving raids, those who initiated them were inevitably aware of the slave/free binary, and of the possibility that their own status in this binary was subject to change. In an interview in the late 1840s, a Hausa Muslim from Katsina named Mohammed claimed to have been captured by the Fulanis while carrying his own slaves to a market. He was then sold to other Fulanis. Likewise, the famous slave-trading Fulani Muslim Job Ben Solomon, was sold by Mandingos in the early 1700s (Reis 121). In both of these cases, and in Abū Bakr's, the transition from captor to captive reflects a shift from activity to passivity, in contrast with the shift from *nkisi* to *simbi*. However, it may relate to the shift from *ndoki* to *nkisi*,

since this involves the incorporation of potentially active components into a passive corpus—the fetish—which comes under the power of its creator.

After his father's death, Abū Bakr's teacher accompanies him to visit the grave in Bouna. Renouard's translation adds that many of his teacher's oldest scholars accompanied them on their trip (Wilks 160). In pre-colonial times, and particularly in rural areas, *fuqahā* (sing. *faqīh*) or experts in Islamic jurisprudence, and students were often the only people who could travel outside their own tribal region in relative safety without making prior arrangements for protection. Thus, their roles in the educational system granted them a liminal status, both geographically and intellectually (Eickelman 496). While Abū Bakr was not a *faqīh*, his father was identified as a *mufasssir*—one learned in Qur'anic exegesis (152). The portrayal of the high status of Abū Bakr and his family served to enhance his image and increase the chance of his emancipation. Put differently, it was intended to increase his liminality between categories of enslavement and freedom. His educational skills undoubtedly aided his liminality in the context of the jobs that he was assigned in Jamaica by allowing him to work more directly and become more familiar with his owner.

3.11 The Yoruba Ritual as a Metaphor for Transformation

While a ritual is often thought to represent the concept of a fixed reality, Margaret Drewal observes that some, if not all, rituals have an inherent improvisatory element in their execution, which lends them an indeterminate quality and enhances their transformational capacity (Drewal xv). The Yoruba concept of ritual has a synecdochic relationship to the human spirit's ontology through birth, death and reincarnation, ritual

journeying, and the journey of the human spirit to the otherworld of ancestors (Drewal xvii). The Yoruba are sensitive to the indeterminacy of life, as seen in the Yoruba transformational processes of play, improvisation and Ifá divination, and as anthropomorphized in the figure of Esu. While repetition is usually viewed as an embodiment of sameness, it is a re-presentation of something from an earlier period and thus has an element of creativity. The act of copying embodies an act of origination via the creation of a new version of something. In the African-American tradition of signifying, repetition includes revision and difference (4). In Gates' view, the revision of the signifier disrupts the signified/signifier relation and expands meaning (5). Drewal interprets Yoruba ritual as repetition with revision. Drewal considers it a form of improvisation in a performative context, and defines the corresponding Yoruba term *ere* broadly as rhetorical play. Not surprisingly, the terms ritual (*etutu*), festival (*odun*), spectacle (*iran*), and play or improvisation (*ere*) are often used interchangeably by the Yoruba (12). In the Yoruba concept of spectacle, there are no fixed roles. It is participatory and relationships between spectator and spectacle are unstable (15). The concept of *àshe* assumes that actors are agents who structure, process, contextualize, and play tropes off of one another. They perform operations on structure, process, and context while improvising on them. At maximum effectiveness, *àshe* must be accompanied by *aba*, the ability to reveal *àshe* through manipulation, negotiation, and persuasion. Improvisation may occur in different ways, including "changing esoteric verses into narratives, spontaneous interpretations, recontextualizations, drumming, dancing, chanting, parody, ruses, reconstitutions of conventions, competing interests, and individual interventions into the ritual event". All of these are connected to the Yoruba

perception of *àshe*. They also are manifest in rituals of syncretistic outgrowths of the Yoruba tradition such as Brazilian Candomblé, Cuban Santería and Lucumí (Drewal 27). The concept of "repetition with variation" is also found in Western Jazz and Blues music and in Arabic orchestral music, where it is sometimes termed "heterophony" (Reynolds, et al. 137).

Yoruba ritual is being constantly revised and reshaped by performers and interpreters—"a multitude of manipulators." In this regard, it differs from scholars' visual opinions about the ritual's rigidity. The metaphor of ritual as a journey in Yoruba thought highlights important aspects of ritual that are rarely touched on otherwise. These include "the subjective experience of participants, their capacities for reflexive self-monitoring, and their transformations of consciousness through play and improvisation" (Drewal 28). Divination verses describe journeys of ancient diviners, deities, and witches during their trips from heaven to earth (32). Not surprisingly, the journey is a key organizing metaphor in Yoruba cosmology that implies both movement and transformation (33).

3.12 Journey as a Metaphor for Transformation

By referring to the ability to transcend boundaries, liminality bears a symbolic parallel with the concept of journeying. Thus it is likely that the emphasis on journeying in Abū Bakr's narrative has a symbolic function. In the Muslim-influenced cultural context of Yorubaland, students' and teachers' freedom to transcend regional boundaries in pursuit of learning illustrates a practical outgrowth of the symbolic parallel between journeying and transformation. It was due to such freedom that Abū Bakr was able to undertake many of his journeys. He sought spiritual and genealogical grounding to

solidify his religious and familial identities—motives that may appear somewhat ironic since they utilize geographical movement as a means to achieve a type of permanence. The high degree of detail which the narrative provides about his ancestry and education may serve to compensate for the dearth of contact between Abū Bakr and his father. He appears to be motivated by a desire for knowledge of his father, perhaps in order to obtain a better understanding of himself. Abū Bakr's quest for knowledge may also be considered a quest for identity. As such, it depicts him as an entity in search of meaning—an idea that is reiterated by the symbolic function of his journeys.

In fact, his father's biological death may be said to mark the beginning of a series of journeys interspersed by Abū Bakr's own two figurative deaths, represented by his initial enslavement and subsequent re-enslavement. While these involve literal journeys from Africa to the Caribbean and back, they are also figurative in that they reflect changes in Abū Bakr's freedom, social prestige, and self-perception. In a sense, he functions as a wandering signifier constantly in search of a signified—reminiscent of how Gates describes the role of Legba (Esu) in Fon metaphysics (Gates, *Signifying* 23). The gradual improvement of his conditions after his first enslavement recalls the increased optimism and integration typical of synecdoche and foreshadows a return to the natural order in keeping with the corresponding Afro-Caribbean trope *nganga*. Yet, this positive trajectory is tragically and ironically curtailed upon his capture and re-enslavement shortly after his return to Africa. He is thus forced to renew the search for his identity, paralleling the renewal of the cycle of master tropes.

It is possible to view Abū Bakr's narrative as a series of journeys that gradually lead from freedom to enslavement. This peripatetic aspect is foreshadowed by the word

"Routes" in the title. Interpreting each journey as a metaphor for a ritual that involves repetition with revision may elucidate similarities between his text and Yoruba thought. During Abū Bakr's stay in Bouna, Adinkra—the Sultan of Bonduku—defeated the forces of the Sultan of Bouna. Shortly thereafter, Abū Bakr is enslaved (Wilks 161-62). His description of this transition emphasizes his change in status and certain aspects of his suffering: "On that very day they made me a captive. They tore off my clothes, bound me with ropes, gave me a heavy load to carry, and led me to the town of Bonduku" (162). His journey to the coastline was allegedly made "all the way on foot, and well loaded" (162). One may interpret these statements as a repetition with revision of the hierarchical matrix to which Abū Bakr was accustomed as a member of the social and educational elite. The subsequent synopsis of his trans-Atlantic voyage gives few details about conditions on the boat. Yet it underscores his subordinate role as a passive object acted upon by others, as seen in the following quotation: "There they sold me to the Christians, and I was bought by a certain captain of a ship at that time. He sent me to a boat, and delivered me over to one of his sailors. The boat immediately pushed off, and I was carried on board of the ship" (162). While there are no references to labor imposed upon Abū Bakr during the voyage, one may interpret two aspects of the trip—his captivity and his passivity—as symbols of his transition to slavery. After three months, his boat reached Jamaica, where he completed his symbolic transition to slavery, as evident in his statement, "This was the beginning of my slavery until this day. I tasted the bitterness of slavery from them, and its oppressiveness" (162). This statement may be interpreted as a repetition with revision of his earlier statements that implicitly condoned slavery.

While Abū Bakr's text contains no explicit references to Yoruba thought, it still bears certain parallels. Yoruba traditionally use rituals as metaphors for journeys and, in doing so, highlight esoteric aspects of rituals such as participants' subjective experience, their abilities to monitor themselves reflexively, and the transformation of their conscious minds through play and improvisation (Drewal 28). At least two of these aspects—subjective experience and reflexive self-monitoring—are apparent in Abū Bakr's narrative. The third aspect—transformation of the conscious mind through play and improvisation—is not explicit in the narrative. However, it is reflected in various commentaries about Abū Bakr's actions in Jamaica and in the letters that Abū Bakr writes to Muḥammad Kaba Saghanughu in which he claims to be a Christian. This transformation is unlikely to be a true religious conversion, since Abū Bakr was studying to be a cleric like his father and grandfather when he was captured at the age of fifteen (Diouf 31, 35). It is more likely a psychological transformation reflected in his increased self-reflection, his awareness of the reversibility of conditions and relationships—namely of his legal status as free or slave, his religious affiliation as Muslim or Christian, and his ability to comment more freely about such reversals, even if they do not really occur. Evident in these changes is a transition to a more ironic frame of mind.

To an extent, the reference to journeying in the title contains an ironic overtone as well. While the word “Routes” implies multiple journeys, it lacks directionality. This idea is reiterated by the geographical shifts and status changes that Abū Bakr undergoes after his initial enslavement. His trip from Africa to Jamaica as a slave is mirrored by his return trip to Africa as a free man. Granted, his freedom in this stage is superficial, since he relies on the assistance of his white protector. Further, during his stop in England, he

is generally regarded by the British onlookers as an exotic Other rather than a civilized equal. In terms of status, the transition inherent in his enslavement is symbolically reversed by his manumission. Yet, shortly after his return to Africa, the act of manumission is overridden and symbolically reversed by his re-enslavement. The cyclical nature of these changes and the indeterminacy that they suggest regarding Abū Bakr's identity parallel the cycles of change in both Western and Yoruba master tropes (Renouard 109-12).

Abū Bakr's alleged misrepresentation of his religious identity in his letter is, in a sense, a parodic repetition of the statements of piety in his narrative. Its reflection of a conversion to Christianity constitutes a variation of his earlier claims, especially when considered in light of his ostensible steadfastness implied in the penultimate paragraph of his narrative—"As God Almighty has said: Nothing can befall us unless it be written for us (in his book)! He is our master: in God, therefore, let all faithful put their trust!"—and in the final paragraph—"The faith of our families is the faith of Islam" (Wilks 162). This projection of piety from a new perspective may also be termed a "repetition with revision," which incidentally is Drewal's definition of the Yoruba ritual. There is no explicit evidence in Abū Bakr's narrative or his subsequent correspondence that he had been influenced by Yoruba culture. The only explicit references that may suggest such an influence are his passage through the Ashanti kingdom as a slave and a brief mention in Renouard's commentary of Abū Bakr's recognition of Ashanti soothsayers—a group indirectly influenced by the Yoruba (Renouard 109-10; Wilks 162). However, a comparison of the contrasting statements of faith in his narrative and subsequent letter to Kaba, especially when considered in light of his affiliation with the Muslim slave

rebellion of 1832 in Jamaica, shows an underlying similarity to what Drewal identifies as the essence of the Yoruba ritual. Granted, there are other cultural practices illustrating this trait which lack any explicit connection with Yoruba culture. This raises the issue of how broadly the Yoruba ritual's essence—repetition with revision—may be applied within semiotic contexts. To a degree, it is an inevitable facet of any repetitive act, even if imperceptible to the emitter and/or the recipient. Yet in deliberately deceptive acts—such as the appropriation or revision of slave narratives, a narrative's embellishment by its own slave protagonist, or a false profession of religious faith—the role of revision is even more integral. As Piedra states, “Mimicry of the master code, as projected in literature, could become officially tolerated, subtle mockery. While the system imposed strict rules on signifiers, it was willing to enrich the ranks of signifieds with outside values” (Piedra, *Monkey* 361). In Abū Bakr's case, this is likely a strategy of partial assimilation to the master code that is intended not to compromise his identity. While his change in signifiers—by way of name change—adheres to the metropolitan culture of Jamaica, his signified reflects a deeper loyalty to his Islamic faith.

3.13 Trickster Figures among Muslim Slaves in the Americas

Perhaps the most unifying element of the narrative in terms of its relevance to the topics of remembrance, noble savagery, and agency is the figure of the trickster. Nowhere is this feature more widespread or more complex than in the topic of Abū Bakr's religion. As one reads in his autobiographical account, his Muslim faith played a central role both in his family's social status in Africa and in his perseverance as a slave in Jamaica. In certain slave communities, such as those of Cuba and Brazil, Muslim

slaves were allowed to openly practice their faith. However, this was not the case in Jamaica. On the contrary, many non-Christian slaves who arrived in Jamaica were forcibly baptized, and those who refused to convert to Christianity suffered harsh punishments. Consequently, many slaves went along with this conversion and became practicing members of churches. Some even became leaders in the church, including as ordained ministers. Being a minister was profitable, since a commission was earned for each slave that was baptized during one's tenure (Afroz, *Jihad* 231). Therefore, some slaves were motivated to become Christian ministers partly by the incentive of income.

The great irony of the Christian conversions of slaves in the Caribbean is that many of them were only nominal in nature. This was particularly true for Muslim slaves, most of whom continued to secretly practice Islam even after joining the church (Afroz, *Invincible* 214; Gomez 121). Muḥammad Kaba Saghanughu, Sam Sharpe and George Lewis were all crypto-Muslim slaves who functioned as local leaders, *marabouts*, or *imams*. They were referred to as “deacons” in non-conformist churches, including Baptist, Moravian and Wesleyan denominations (Afroz, *Invincible* 214). The leadership positions which these three men assumed in churches make their simultaneous leadership of Muslim communities even more surprising. Nevertheless, Sam Sharpe was an instigator of rebellious meetings. As slave in Montego Bay and a member of the Baptist Church, he could read and became a regular speaker and leader at the Baptist mission (102-03). What he referred to publicly as his interpretations of biblical scripture were actually Qur’anic teachings. Eventually, he detached the Baptist missionary organization from his society. Even under cross-examinations of white missionaries, he utilized ambiguity regarding his name, plantation, and owner. The plantations at which he

claimed to work included Croydon, Hazelymph, Capudopa and Cooper's Hill. The names he gave for himself on different occasions included Thorp, Tharp, Sharp, and Sharpe (Afroz, *Jihad* 238). The use of different names is also seen in Kaba's alternating use of the last names "Peart" and "Tuffit" as part of his post-conversion alias (Madden, *West Indies* 134; Wilks 164). In a letter written by Angell to Madden, dated October 7, 1834, Angell includes a biographical sketch of Kaba in which he claims that the latter had been a Christian for about twenty years and did not regret his captivity since it facilitated his coming to know Christ (Madden, *West Indies* 135). However, Kaba, like many other crypto-Muslims enslaved in Jamaica, continued to practice Islam in secret while attending church services regularly (Afroz, *Moors* 166). Moreover, both he and they viewed their clandestine practice as a form of *jihād* (Afroz, *Jihad* 229).

Muslim slaves utilized a variety of strategies to maintain the integrity of their faith. Many of these strategies were related to the practice of *taqiyya*, or protective dissimulation, which some schools of Islamic thought deem permissible in situations of duress (Kohlberg 395). Nevertheless, many slaves continued to use Islamic invocations and greetings, in both speech and writing (Afroz, *Moors* 166). Examples of this are found in a letter written to Abū Bakr by Kaba:

In the name of God, Merciful omnificent, the blessing of God, the peace of his prophet Mahomet.

This is from the hand of Mahomed Caba [sic], unto Bekir Sadiki Scheriffe [sic]. If this comes into your hands sooner or later, send me a satisfactory answer for yourself this time by your real name, Robert Tuffit, and the property is named Spice Grove. I am glad to hear you are master of yourself, it is a heartfelt joy to me, for Many [sic] told me about your character. I thank you to give me a good answer, "Salaam aleikoum [sic]." Edward Donlan (Madden, *West Indies* 199; Wilks 164-65).

In this letter, one may see that the traditional Muslim invocation is used to confirm the letter's status as a correspondence from one Muslim to another. The author, Kaba, includes the honorific title "sharīf"—albeit with a different transliteration—in his address to Abū Bakr in order to acknowledge the latter's status as a descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad. He also uses the traditional Islamic greeting "Salaam aleikum," meaning "Peace be with you." While reflecting the maintenance of Islamic traditions, this letter also provides what may be interpreted as evidence of subversion. The author makes it clear that both he and his addressee use alternate names in English and in Arabic, depending on the context. This may be partly due to the imposition of English names by white slaveholders in conjunction with the slaves' forced baptisms. However, it is also possible that they were used voluntarily by slaves as a means of concealing their true religious inclinations, which, if true in the case of Kaba, would invalidate Angell's claim about his conversion to Christianity. Even Madden showed awareness of and surprise at Kaba's subversion, as is implied by the following observations written in his memoirs:

The curious part of his case is this:—he writes a letter in Arabic to Donlan, and states to Mr. Angell that the purport of the letter is to convert Donlan from Mohametanism to the Christian faith; and for this purpose the old African requests of me to be the medium of communication between them. But what is my surprise at finding the letter of the old man, who is so anxious to convert his countryman from the Mussulman creed, commencing in these terms, 'In the name of God, the merciful, and omnipotent, the blessing of God, the peace of his prophet Mahomet!' So much for the old African's renunciation of Islamism (Afroz, *Jihad* 236, 242; Madden, *West Indies* 195).

In the subsequent paragraph of his memoirs, Madden quotes a letter written by Abū Bakr in which the latter states that, in addition to the Old and New Testaments in Arabic which he has already received, he is "now very anxious to get a prayer-book, the psalms, and an Arabic grammar—*also a copy of the Alcoran*" (Madden, *West Indies* 195-96). Besides

the alternate use of names that could suggest loyalties to different religions, the mediating role that Madden assumes between the two slaves is also curious. To an extent, this role parallels the roles of both the *griot* and the trickster in African cultures and raises the question of whether or not Madden's influence on their exchange is entirely neutral.

A common strategy for preserving a sense of Islamic community was the formation of cohesive groups that largely isolated themselves from the remaining slave population (Gomez 71). They worked with non-Muslim slaves as necessitated by their tasks, yet they did not socialize with them. To a large degree, this was true even in Cuba where Islam was permitted. In Jamaica, where Islam was forbidden, maintaining one's faith as a Muslim was even more difficult. This may be one reason why Abū Bakr had difficulty in finding other speakers of Arabic. It may also partially explain the guilt expressed at the end of his narrative, as seen in the following quotation: "Verily I have erred and done wickedly, but I entreat God to guide my heart in the right path" (Wilks 163). According to Afroz, his feeling of guilt is due to his fear that, even though he has inwardly maintained his faith in Islam, he has lost his Islamic values. In spite of any such feelings, he took certain measures to demonstrate the integrity of his faith. One of these was the production of a written copy of the Qur'an in Arabic, whose authenticity was verified by Madden (Afroz, *Jihad* 230).

Maintaining proficiency in Arabic presented a significant challenge for Muslim slaves. Some practiced writing in the sand to maintain their skill in Arabic, as well as in European languages (Diouf 111). In Brazil, some valued the Qur'an so much that they would buy it for prices that would take a year to pay off (113-14). In fact, it has been said that the size of the Muslim community in Brazil may be estimated by the number of

Qur'ans sold. The Count of Gobineau, who was the French Minister in Brazil, reported in 1869 that the French booksellers of Fauchon and Dupont sold 100 copies of the Koran each year in Rio de Janeiro (Falola and Childs 101). Slaves in Brazil ordered Arabic grammar books from overseas (Diouf 120). When Qur'ans were not accessible, they read Bibles in Arabic to maintain their literacy (112). Since Christianity, like Islam, is an Abrahamic religion, its holy book is considered sacred by Muslims. Thus, its reading by Muslims was not deemed heretical. Since most non-Muslims were unaware of this, they were likely to interpret a slave from a Muslim country reading the Bible as evidence of conversion. Reading the Bible in Arabic and purchasing Arabic grammar books were two strategies adopted by Abū Bakr to maintain his skills in Arabic, as attested to by Madden in his memoirs (Madden, *West Indies* 133-34).

However, the learning undertaken by slaves was sometimes erroneous. Examples of this are found in “The Amusement of the Foreigner” by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Baġdādī, a nineteenth century imam from Istanbul about his visit to Brazil (al-Baġdādī 5). By the time of his visit, the Brazilian slaves had already been emancipated. Yet their community was small and while they proudly identified with Islam, they were largely unfamiliar with its details. As the author states, “They remember their forefather’s religion, and harkened back to it. Any person who has a religion depends upon it. The Muslims are a small community but their hearts are sick of ignorance. Because they left their country when they were very small, none of them have learned the religion of the Chosen Prophet.” (al-Baġdādī 8)

Al-Baġdādī goes on to describe his interaction with a translator whom he alleges to be a former Jew and whom he accuses of deliberately mistranslating the Qur’an into

Portuguese to the detriment of the Muslim community in Bahia (al-Baġdādī 9-10). He describes his own attempts to resolve this dilemma by assisting with a new translation of the Qur'an (10). Since this venture was unsuccessful due to the other translator's duplicity, however, al-Baġdādī's only recourse is to find a ready-made—and presumably accurate—translation for the Brazilian Muslims to use.

I passed through a small shop where a man was selling Christian books. I entered to see if I could find an Arabic-Portuguese dictionary. I found a *quran* printed in France, containing no mistakes or faults, that was acceptable. I asked the owner how he had gotten it. He said: "it is my job to get books from different countries to beautify my shop in other people's eyes. This one came from France and it is been some time that it is lying here; nobody in this country wants it". I said: "how much do you want for it?" He said: "One French Lira". I said: "Can you get me more of these?" He said "yes." I paid him a deposit and after some time the *quran* came and the Muslims bought them and I recuperated the money I had paid the seller. People acquired copies of the *quran* and circulated them. This problem is solved. (16)

Al-Baġdādī's account evidences the important roles that translation and mistranslation played in Muslim communities in the Americas, and acknowledges the extent to which the latter was seen to threaten the integrity of their faith. It is for this reason that he intervened as a teacher, translator, and ultimately purveyor of books—reminiscent of the *griot*-like intermediary role played by Madden in Cuba. Some Qur'anic schools in Bahia, Brazil included slaves as teachers (Diouf 119). Yet, given the problems described in "The Amusement of the Foreigner," one wonders about the accuracy of their teachings.

In spite of the adoption of English names by Abū Bakr and Kaba and their regular attendance at a Baptist church, they both actively perpetuated Islam—a practice often interpreted by historians as a form of slave resistance (Afroz, *Jihad* 232). In fact, their involvement eventually gave rise to the *Jihād* of 1832, a struggle alternately known as the "Baptist Rebellion" or "Baptist War," due to the alleged leadership roles of Baptist

missionaries and independent ministers (Afroz, *Jihad* 227, Gomez 54). However, other sources claim that the rebellion was led by crypto-Muslims throughout the island who collectively responded to a call for *jihād* (Afroz, *Jihad* 227). This call came in the form of a pastoral letter or *wathīqa* calling for a slave rebellion, which was received by Kaba during his residence in the Manchester Parish of Jamaica (Afroz, *Jihad* 232; Wilks 163).

A letter written to Madden by B. Angell describes Kaba's correspondence from Africa:

About three years ago [1831], he received from Kingston, by the hands of a boy, a paper written in Africa forty-five years previously. He knew it to be of this date, as the paper purported to have been written in the forty-third year of the age of the King, Allaman Talco, who was thirty-five years old when he (R. P.) left the country. The paper exhorted all the followers of Mahomet to be true and faithful, if they wished to go to Heaven, etc. (Madden, *West Indies* 135-36)

Wilks' chapter includes a copy of the letter which is identical, except that it replaces the abbreviation "R. P." with the name, "Robert Peart," one of the aliases used by Kaba. Although an African king's age is used as a point of reference for the year, dating by reference to a ruler's age would be very unlikely. A more plausible interpretation is that "the forty-third year" referred to the time elapsed since the year 1200 of the Muslim calendar, which would have been 1827 or 1828. Since the *jihād* of Jamaica occurred in 1832, the year after Kaba's receipt of the letter, it is reasonable to consider it as a possible outgrowth of this letter. Given the mutual congratulations expressed between Kaba and Abū Bakr in their two letters written in 1834, it is likely that the emancipation of both was strongly influenced by the 1832 rebellion. However, there were numerous injunctions to *jihād* in West Africa during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which may have influenced both men. These include the *jihād* of 'Uthmān dan Fodio in 1804, the *jihād* of *Shehu* Ahmadu in 1818, the latter's extension of power to Timbuktu in 1826-

27, and the claim made by al-Ḥajj ‘Umar al-Futi to be a *khalifa* of the Tijaniyya after returning from Mecca in the 1830’s (Wilks 163-64).

Kaba’s involvement in the 1832 *jihād* is reflected in his frequent correspondence with George Lewis, a black Baptist leader and former slave. Although he preached in the church, he was widely regarded as a heretic for having rejected orthodox Christian instruction. Because of the stigma against him, he was never invited to join the Moravian Brethren and did not seek membership in the church. Instead, he offered his own services to people in the Manchester and St. Elizabeth Parishes. Lewis was killed in the 1832 uprising in Manchester, which was considered to be part of the larger Baptist Rebellion, spanning the parishes of St. James, Hanover, Trelawny, Westmoreland, St. Elizabeth, and Manchester. It totaled approximately 750 square miles, and involved more than 200 estates and 60,000 slaves (Afroz, *Jihad* 236). Lewis’ acts—like those of Kaba and Abū Bakr—illustrate a type of subterfuge which was a common survival tactic used by Muslim slaves.

Despite claims of Kaba’s leadership, other sources purport that he refused to take part in the rebellion. If true, it is suspected that his stance was emulated by many other slaves in his parish (Gomez 53-54). While some might interpret Kaba’s and Abū Bakr’s apparent passivity regarding such an event as a sign of conversion to Christianity, there are other possible explanations. One is that they were relatively content in the Muslim community to which they belonged and had no strong desire to leave it, even if this meant remaining enslaved. When presented with the opportunity to return to Africa, many enslaved and formerly enslaved Muslims opted to remain in their communities in the Americas, since they enjoyed a social and spiritual camaraderie, and working

conditions which were better than those of most slaves. Returning to Africa could bring them to a situation of political unrest and war, which could lead to their re-enslavement, as was ultimately the case with Abū Bakr (Gomez 56, 116-17).

Another possible reason for Kaba's refusal to participate in the slave uprising may be that he sought a more internal form of rebellion. This appears to be consistent with the first category of response to Muslim enslavement, which involves a "ritualized compliance in which self-regard is retained" (Gomez 178). This also corresponds with his baptism under the name Robert Tuffit and his ostensible conversion to Christianity. Madden himself appears to interpret the letter written by Kaba to Abū Bakr in 1834 as an attempt by the former to convert the latter to Christianity. While certain aspects of the letter suggest a Christian faith, others—such as the use of a traditional Islamic greeting—suggest a Muslim one (Gomez 53, Wilks 164-66). The codified written correspondence between the two men gives credence to the idea of a continued Muslim faith under the guise of conversion to Christianity (Gomez 54).

Kaba's duplicity was also evident when he and others were examined by a group of magistrates suspicious of their religious affiliation. When questioned about the type of religious instruction that they received, he convinced the magistrates that they were learning the Gospels to make them more valuable servants and better members of society (Afroz, *Jihad* 236). Kaba's comment is surprising in a way, since despite the prohibition of Islam, in the earliest stage of slavery in Jamaica, it was considered unwise to convert slaves to Christianity. This attitude was based on the belief that a conversion to Christianity would make slaves lazy and take up too much of their time that could be spent working. Even after being taught Christianity, slaves in Jamaica were not allowed

to join the Church of England (Elam 101). The Christian influence among them was small until the arrival of Baptist missionaries. Over time, the Christian teachings were gradually mixed with African religions brought by slaves; it was in this newly combined sect that slaves found an outlet for self-expression. While missionaries did not fear a revolt, since they considered the Christian doctrine to be a barrier against such action, slaves believed that this very doctrine legitimized a revolt. Further, religious meetings were the only place where slaves were allowed to gather freely and they did so without the presence of Baptist missionaries (102).

In spite of Jamaica's prohibition of Islam, Christian slave owners often admired Muslim slaves and considered them superior to non-Muslim slaves (Diouf 97). Many colonists in the Caribbean went so far as to make a correlation between slaves' level of intelligence and their knowledge of Arabic (98). Muslim slaves were promoted and trusted in particular ways, such as being assigned positions as overseers, administrators or superintendents. This practice was not limited to the Caribbean, but could also be found in Guyana, Trinidad and the American south (102). The aforementioned ecclesiastical positions held by George Lewis and Sam Sharpe, as well as the bookkeeping responsibilities delegated to Abū Bakr by his owner are examples of this (102-03, 108).

While details of Kaba's personal scholarship are not available, his last name "Saghanughu" represented a tradition of Muslim scholarly lineage in West Africa that was linked to the Qadiriyyah Sufi brotherhood (Afroz, *Bucra* 4). Thus, there is reason to believe that he may have been influenced by this tradition. 'Uthmān dan Fodio, who issued the call for a *jihād* in 1804 and was a ruler of the Sokoto Caliphate in Northwest

Africa, was also a leader of the Qadiriyyah order in this region, a fact which makes the possibility of Kaba's correspondence with him more credible (Bivar 235).

Dan Fodio's *wathīqa* or manifesto of *jihād*, which was written in Arabic, provided a list of twenty-seven rules which Muslims were expected to uphold. Several of these make explicit reference to slavery, and thus, would have been particularly relevant to Africans living in the Caribbean. They include prohibitions against the enslavement of freeborn Muslims in both Muslim and non-Muslim territory, non-Muslims (heathen), warmongers and oppressors. The topic of slavery is also mentioned with respect to apostates, but in this case, the ruling is more complex. While dan Fodio states that the more widespread opinion is that the enslavement of apostates should be forbidden, another opinion states that a person may enslave apostates, as long as he is obeying an authority which asserts its legality (Bivar 240-41). In spite of Islam's general prohibition of the enslavement of Muslims and dan Fodio's accordance with this, the unorthodox opinion regarding apostates to which he also alludes may have motivated Abū Bakr to distinguish himself from apostates in order to diminish the likelihood of his continued or future enslavement.

While the struggle for personal and religious freedom among African Muslims enslaved in the Caribbean was one factor which would have motivated their interest in a *jihād*, they may also have been motivated by certain events transpiring in Africa. These included competition between various leaders to assume the title of caliph of Sokoto. One example of this was the *jihād* of Shehu Ahmadu in Massina, which was sometimes viewed as an extension of the Fulani *jihād* in Hausaland by 'Uthman dan Fodio. Dan Fodio's *jihād* initially inspired Shehu Ahmadu, but eventually dissatisfied him due to

what he perceived as the laxity of its rulers (Levtzion 587). Further, Shehu Ahmadu sought for himself the title of caliph. Shehu Ahmadu's struggle for leadership of the Sokoto Caliphate had a mutually influential relationship with a document attributed to Maḥmūd al-Ka'ti, titled *Ta'rīkh al-fattāsh fī akhbār al-buldān wa 'l-juyūsh wa-akābir al-nās* (The chronicle of the researcher into the history of countries, armies, and principle personalities [sic]) (572-73).

In 1911, an incomplete version of this document, labeled MS A, was presented by Sīdī Muḥammed al-Imām Ibn al-Suyūṭī to the scholar, M. Bonnel Mézières, and a copy, labeled MS B, was made by him under Ibn al-Suyūṭī's supervision. Later that year, Ibn al-Suyūṭī made available his own copy, MS A, which was considered more reliable than its copy, MS B. Also, MS A contained important marginal notes and three isolated pages, one of which is an excerpt from *Ta'rīkh al-Sudān* (The History of the Sudan), whose writing is thought to have been completed in 1655 and which was published between 1898 and 1900 (Levtzion 571-572).

In 1912, another copy of the document was made, this time by Abdulai Wali Bah of Kayes and designated MS C. MS C was not copied from either MS A or MS B, but from a much older original which, although in worse condition, was considered to be a complete copy of the same work. An important feature of MS C was its first part, absent from MS A and MS B, which has different prophecies about the coming of the last of the twelve caliphs envisaged by the prophet Muḥammad. More specifically, it states that the caliph will be Ahmad of the (Fulani) Sangare tribe in Massina. It also provides insight on the tradition which claims that Shehu Ahmadu destroyed all copies that he could obtain of the earlier versions of *Ta'rīkh al-fattāsh*—MS A and MS B—since these did not

contain explicit references to him. Most scholars accept that these documents are not a fulfilled fifteenth century prophecy, but a nineteenth century fabrication made during Shehu Ahmadu's life in order to confirm his claim to the caliphate (Levtzion 572-73).

Even though Ibn al-Suyūṭī lived almost a century after Shehu Ahmadu, he may have deliberately omitted from his own copy, MS A, any evidence supporting Shehu Ahmadu's legitimacy. While some scholars consider MS C to be an older and more reliable copy than MS A, and one that was copied from a different original, others believe MS A to be the original. They suggest that MS C is a copy of it, most likely created during the first quarter of the nineteenth century during the life of Shehu Ahmadu, with additional sections forged in support of his rule (Levtzion 573, 576). In one work cited by dan Fodio, al-Suyūṭī indicates that the twelfth caliph, who is understood to be the *mahdī*, will appear at the beginning of the thirteenth century (585). al-Suyūṭī also identifies Shehu Ahmadu as this caliph (588). His manipulation and destruction of documents in support of Shehu Ahmadu may have been an attempt to facilitate dan Fodio's continued rule by eliminating a challenge from Shehu Ahmadu.

It is possible that some of Shehu Ahmadu's supporters who opposed the caliphate of 'Uthmān dan Fodio were viewed as heretics, apostates, warmongers or oppressors due to their resistance against what many considered to be dan Fodio's legitimate rule. In this case, a *jihād* against them would have seemed justified, since Shehu Ahmadu's supporters would have fit in the categories of people who could be fought in a *jihād*, according to dan Fodio's manifesto. While this manifesto does not specify whether the intended adversary is located in Islamic or non-Islamic lands, its instructions refer to rules that apply in both locations. Thus, regardless of whether it was written in response to

conditions in Africa or the Caribbean, it could have motivated readers in the Caribbean such as Kaba to wage a *jihād* of their own against Spanish and Creole oppressors.

Some non-Islamic practices in the Sokoto Caliphate were outgrowths of religious and linguistic syncretism that had existed earlier during the rule of Sonni ‘Alī of the Songhai Empire (Hiskett, *Islamic* 578). While Sonni ‘Alī maintained certain Islamic tenets such as monotheism, he also permitted the use of idols, the veneration of trees and stones, and superstitions such as the belief that a fox had spoken (579-80). Teachers of Islamic studies and jurists were thought to be corrupt, at least partially due to their limited knowledge of Arabic (580-81). The thinker al-Maghīlī criticized those who claimed to be Muslim but still practiced paganism, saying that Holy War against the polytheists who claim to be Muslims is more meritorious than that against those who do not. In both the condemned practices attributed to the Songhai Empire and the responses of people who disapproved of them, various trickster elements may be seen. The most obvious example would be the profession of one religion simultaneously with the practice of another—a phenomenon which al-Maghīlī considered to be worse than unbelief (584). On a linguistic level, the continued teaching of Islamic studies in spite of an awareness of a lack of fluency in Arabic, which reflects at best an indifference regarding the propagation of inaccuracy, is also a form of deception. Both accidental and deliberate propagation of inaccuracy are acknowledged to have existed in communities of former Muslim slaves in Brazil (al-Baġdādī 10). The reference to a speaking fox by Sonni ‘Alī is also interesting, given that the fox is an animal commonly associated with the trickster.

Sokoto reformers were strongly influenced by Maliki juridical positions of jurists from North Africa and Spain against Muslims inhabiting Andalusia. Maliki jurists

condemned the use of *Mudejar* status by Muslims in Andalusia and had varying opinions regarding the acceptability of Muslims residing in non-Muslim territories. Maliki jurists tended to condemn this type of residence. However, some argued that it was acceptable for Muslims to live in non-Islamic lands if they were comfortable and planned to spread Islam. Muslim jurists viewed the world through a dichotomy between the domain of Islam (*Dār al-Islām*) where Islamic tradition prevailed, and the domain of war or domain of unbelief (*Dār al-Ḥarb* or *Dār al Kufr*), where the prevailing traditions were non-Islamic (Umar 136-37). They conceptualized relations between these two regions as being in a perpetual state of war, although such a state did not always involve fighting.

Jurists who were opposed to Muslims' residence in non-Muslim lands likely feared that Muslims would be corrupted by foreign influences whose values were contrary to their own. They were aware that in such contexts, Muslims became immersed in a cultural milieu as both active and passive participants in exchanges of values and ideas. This created several risks. After Muslims' speech and behavior were corrupted, they could still be (mis)interpreted by non-Muslims as accurately representing Islamic views. In addition to projecting a potentially false image of Islam to non-Muslims, there existed the danger that Muslims themselves—and by extension, the religious and cultural matrices to which they belonged—could become corrupt. For jurists who approved of Muslims living in non-Muslim lands, their approval was contingent upon both Muslims' emotional stability and their ability to maintain a forward progression in the expansion of their faith. While neither criterion was proof of Muslims' success in maintaining the authenticity of their religious tradition, they both indicated that entities involved in the maintenance and spread of Islam were stable and at little risk of being reversed. In

keeping with the trope of metaphor, both groups of jurists prioritized the continued expression of Muslim faith within existing paradigms and hierarchies. They aimed to prevent a more dialectical situation—in keeping with the tropes of irony and *simbi*—in which traditional relationships would be challenged.

3.14 Jihād, Islamic Revivalism, and Their Relation to the Meta-Tropes

Revivalist movements throughout the history of Islam can be partly attributed to the Muslim community's inability to preserve an ideal form of its religion and community when it is in disarray, and to create a world unified on the basis of Islamic principles. Contrary to reformism, revivalism is backward-looking, and shows a desire to return to former customs and conditions. *Jihād* is normally seen as an instrument of revivalism, for the purpose of extending the frontiers of Islam and returning believers to their roots (Willis 395). For the realization of this goal, the *ḥadīth* predict the coming of a *mujaddid* or renewer at the beginning of every century (398). Islamic revivalism could parallel the trope of *simbi*, which reverses the relationship between signifier and signified; and the Western trope irony, which, as the culmination of the cycle of master tropes, foreshadows the beginning of a new cycle. Like *simbi*, revivalism could constitute a negative, yet active, link between the individual and tradition, if one associates tradition with the contemporary form of Islam that was deemed deficient. While the concept of renewal may be ambiguous through its potential implication of reform, in this case, it refers to a renewal of old ways by essentially reforming reforms that have already taken place. In this sense, one may view the earlier reforms as transitions between a signifier (the unadulterated principles of Islam) and a signified (changes rendered upon either their

interpretation or their practice). One may also view the reforming of these reforms as a reversal of the initial transition in an attempt to revive the fundamental essence.

Of course, such a reversal cannot bring back a pure version of the original. Just as *simbi* and irony differ from their preceding tropes in terms of both complexity and directionality, the same is true for religious revivalism or renewal. Like irony, revivalism and renewal tend to reflect a broader awareness of theoretical paradigms and practical applications than does the initial form of a religion. Such awareness informs and, to a certain extent, motivates the return to a tradition's roots. It also implies that a departure from these roots has already taken place and that the current tradition being acted upon constitutes a deviation from the original. Just as the new metaphor that occurs after irony in the renewal of the cycle of master tropes is not identical to the original metaphor, neither will the result of a religious revival be identical to its original. Both religious revivals and renewed metaphoric paradigms are similar to their originals in their style of outlook. Yet they are both more aware than their predecessors of competing ideologies, due to the various influences that contribute to their renewal.

Classical jurists identified multiple ways in which a believer could fulfill the obligation of *jihād*. According to Willis, *jihād* was defined as "an effort directed against any object of disapprobation by use of the heart, the tongue, the hands, and the sword" (Willis 398). *Jihād* of the heart involves fighting temptation through purifying the soul. *Jihād* of the tongue and hands entails commanding good and forbidding bad. *Jihād* of the sword involves combating unbelievers and enemies of the faith in open warfare. Before combating objects of disapproval, it was necessary to withdraw oneself from them through the act of *hijra*, in imitation of the prophet's migration from the city of Medina.

Hijra of the heart involves turning one's mind from evil and temporal things. *Hijra* of the tongue and hands is realized through the withdrawal of verbal or physical support for things forbidden by the Qur'an, Sunna, or Ijmā'. *Hijra* of the sword involves extrication of oneself from unbelievers or from those who would harm Islam (Willis 398-99).

The different ways in which *jihād* may be fulfilled all constitute types of secondary reform carried out against bad influences for the purpose of purification and renewal, and thus on the most basic level correspond with *simbi*. *Hijra*, which is the preparatory step prior to *jihād*, whether in the form of a symbolic migration from one place to another; or a mental, behavioral, or social removal from negative influences; is cognizant of a departure from the fundamentals that must be reversed. Its directional orientation parallels the reversal of the signifier-signified relationship inherent in *simbi*. On a more subtle level, however, one may associate each step of either *jihād* or *hijra* with a specific Yoruba trope.

On an internal level, *jihād* and *hijra* correspond with *ndoki*, since they attempt to alter a person's natural spiritual order in a struggle between good and evil. The second stage of *jihād*, which aims to promote good and discourage evil in an individual's social milieu; and the second stage of *hijra*, which aims to remove a person from the presence of evil, both correspond with *nkisi*. One reason for this is that the second stage effectively juxtaposes an individual with negative influences and with people who practice them. In accordance with *nkisi*'s corresponding Western trope—metonymy, this stage involves categorization of Muslim and non-Muslim people and behaviors and acknowledges the contiguous, mutually influential relationship between them. Also in keeping with metonymy, the acts of verbal prohibition of evil and self-extrication from

that evil involve an act of de-centering by perceiving the world in terms of categories beyond the self, as well as a displacement from harmful contexts. The final stage of *jihād*, which is more aggressively combative; or that of *hijra*, which entails a more definitive extrication of oneself from the presence of infidels, shares certain elements with the third trope of each series—*nganga* or synecdoche. Like *nganga*, this stage of *jihad* or *hijra* attempts more assertively than previous stages to restore the natural order of Islam. Similar to synecdoche, people at this stage express an awareness of reversibility and a goal of reversing cultural and religious trends that are antithetical to their faith. However, this stage of *jihād* or *hijra* also has connections with the final trope in each series—*simbi* or irony. It challenges the traditional relationship of peaceful cohabitation between Muslims and non-Muslims and even challenges the signification of what it means to be a faithful Muslim. It is also negational in that it explicitly and emphatically attempts to reverse deviations from the Islamic tradition.

One prophecy of Muḥammad was that the thirteenth century of the Muslim calendar, corresponding with the period of 1785-1882 A.D., would mark the final triumph of Islam over infidelity. Of the Twelve Caliphs predicted to follow the Prophet, ten had already appeared. Askia Muḥammad was believed to be the eleventh. The twelfth Caliph, who would also fulfill the role of *mahdī*, subsequent to his reign as Caliph, was to appear during the thirteenth century and would be followed by the world's end. Shehu Ahmadu tried to assert his claim as the twelfth Caliph. He expanded certain passages of the *Ta'rīkh al-fattāsh* which allegedly mentioned that the final *mujaddid* caliph would be named Ahmad. He also supposedly tried to destroy the remaining unaltered copies (Willis 402). 'Uthman dan Fodio and al-Ḥājj 'Umar Tal had revelations

which convinced them that they were chosen by Allah to lead *jihāds* (Willis 402-03). However, dan Fodio claimed that he himself was not the *mahdī* (403-04).

‘Uthmān dan Fodio and Sheikh ‘Umar preached against the prevailing abuses of their time and viewed themselves as successors to the caliphs (Willis 407). Dan Fodio's main criticisms against the Hausa aristocracy were its failure to enforce *Shari’a* law and to provide good examples to the Muslim community, due to its pagan practices. They emphasized that, to be worthy of the title of caliph or imam, a ruler must not only recognize *Shari’a*, but enforce it. They scorned inactivity and compromise in discourse and action (409). Thus, they were in keeping with the views of Askia Muḥammad and al-Maghīlī, who stated that the *mujaddid* must command right, forbid wrong, resolve disputes, judge fairly, promote truth against vanity, and help the oppressed (402).

The goal of Dan Fodio’s *jihad* was not to expand a Muslim state, but to replace state institutions that were considered deviant from an Islamic perspective and to fight heterodoxy among local Muslims (Reis 127). It was aimed primarily against the syncretism allowed by the accommodating attitudes of Muslim leaders in the Haut-Senegal-Niger region. Both he and Sheikh Umar faced increased resistance in the second stage of their *jihād*, in which they moved to the hand and mouth forms of *jihad* (Willis 410). Dan Fodio reiterated that, according to injunctions in the *Qur’an*, *Sunna*, and *Ijmā’*, no Muslim could stay in a country where the laws of Islam were altered, thus alluding to syncretists. Umar and dan Fodio based their own decisions partly on the legal decision regarding Muslims in Granada, Spain during the Christian Reconquest. Here, one devout Muslim refused to accompany fellow Muslims on a *hijra* out of Spain, on the basis that he was needed in Spain to serve as a legal advocate for the few remaining Muslims (411).

However, according to the *fatwa* issued by 'Abd al-Wahīd bin Aḥmad al-Wansharīsī, this man had no doctrinal basis and, thus, gave a bad example. It was thought that he would be unable to practice his religion properly in Spain due to the absence of an imam necessary for alms and identifying the moon for *Ramaḍān*. There was also the danger of gradually adopting customs and language of the Christians, and that if the Arabic language disappeared, so would the Islamic religious practices (Willis 412).

Dan Fodio's opposition to Muslims living in non-Muslim lands on the basis of the potential corruption of their values relates to the theory of master tropes. The first Muslims to proselytize in an infidel country would correspond with the trope of *ndoki* due to their status as agents in possession of free will with an intention of changing the country's natural order through the creation of a new Islamic community. Also in keeping with *ndoki*, they would constitute agents who materialized a relationship between the known (Islam) and the unknown (religions other than Islam) in this new context. At least in the beginning, the *nkisi* that they would create would entail the new Islamic community as well as the various traditions and practices that accompany it. Over time, however, such expatriate Muslims would come to constitute *nkisis* in their own right. As people whose job entailed setting an example and living in accordance with the laws that they teach, they are messengers who, to a certain extent, become manifestations of their own message. Muslim proselytizers would incorporate themselves into the tradition that they sought to perpetuate for several reasons. Closer contact with their target audience would enhance their degree of influence. Also, accordance between teaching and lifestyle would enhance the former's credibility and facilitate its emulation. If Islamic faith is viewed in terms of *nkisi*'s Western counterpart—metonymy, its demonstration

and explication could constitute a metaphor and second metonym respectively—the two basic components into which a metonym may be subdivided.

However, influence in a context such as this is bidirectional; thus, Muslims' own traditions are affected, perhaps unbeknownst to them, by the culture of their religious adversaries. At least in some cases, Muslim revivalists are aware that such changes take place and need to be rectified, since this is the primary incentive for campaigns of revivalism and renewal. Yet it is easier for them to identify this change in other people's behavior than in their own. Revivalists would constitute *nganga*, via their attempts to manipulate or reform religious practices in an attempt to restore the natural order. Such efforts would symbolically parallel Yoruba priests' attempts to maintain their tradition's authenticity by transcending the boundary between message (*nkisi*) and messenger (*nganga*) through rituals that symbolize an unbroken, intergenerational chain. Yet the result of Muslim proselytizers' work, though perhaps closer to the original form of Islam than what had existed in the infidel land prior to their revivalist efforts, will still have syncretistic elements. Since this result will challenge traditional relationships and meanings, it corresponds with the trope of *simbi*.

Attitudes towards problems facing Islam in nineteenth-century West Africa were decidedly revivalist. In contrast to contemporaneous Middle Eastern reformists who attempted to deal with non-Islamic polities by restating the basic principles of Islam in the light of their historical milieu, West African revivalists aimed to return to basic Islamic principles—not in order to accommodate or adjust, but to rediscover and revive (Willis 414). They did this not only to counter the influence of the West, which was clearly non-Islamic, but also to deal with the threat of syncretism and polytheism in

Africa. Both of these contexts are marked by dialogic struggles—on a broader scale between *Dār al-Islām* and *Dār al-Ḥarb*, and on a more minute level within the context of *Dār al-Islām*. Even though the Middle East and West Africa both fall predominantly within the category of *Dār al-Islām*, they are still influenced by events and conditions in *Dār al-Ḥarb*. Thus any changes made in these contexts for the purpose of strengthening, renewing, or purifying Islam are by nature reactionary. If nothing else, their changes are acknowledgements of other cultures and religions, since they occur in response to these entities' presence. This is true even for West-African revivalists who claim to be rediscovering rather than adapting. Beyond this, there may be specific examples of syncretism in which Islamic practices or products are influenced by non-Islamic ones.

Since all regions in the Americas would have fallen under the general category of *Dār al-Ḥarb*, it is possible that Muslims slaves there—especially those familiar with passages in the *Qur'an*, *Sunna*, and *Ijmā'* which forbade Muslims from staying in countries where the customary laws of Islam were altered—may have feared that cultural, linguistic and religious syncretism would threaten their moral integrity. This may explain Abū Bakr's expression of guilt at the end of his narrative. In addition to drawing from their own personal experiences, Muslim slaves' opinions of non-Muslim governments may have been influenced by other West African texts which addressed the topic of religion.

One such text, attributed to 'Uthman dan Fodio, is *Kitāb al-farq bayn wilāyāt ahl al-islām wa bayn wilāyāt ahl al-kufr* (Hiskett, *Farq* 558). This text is divided into four sections, the first two of which are most relevant here, since they provide a contrastive description of the methods of government used in non-Muslim countries—The Habe

Kingdoms of West Africa)—and Muslim countries respectively (Hiskett, *Farq* 559). In the beginning of the first section, he sets a critical tone with the following statement: “indeed the intention of the unbelievers in their governments is only the fulfilling of their lusts, for they are like the beasts. God Most High has said: ‘they are but as the cattle; nay, they are farther astray from the way!’; ‘they eat as the cattle eat, and the fire shall be their lodging.’” He goes on to describe other faulty habits of these governments and their people including cruelty, financial greed, consumption of forbidden substances, wearing of forbidden clothes, living in inappropriately decorated houses, and engaging in illicit sexual activity (567). He criticizes the lenient punishments meted out by non-Islamic governments for crimes such as adultery, theft, murder, and personal injury. He also criticizes the governments' exploitation of people through taxation and the appropriation of inheritance. Interestingly, he complains that travelers are mistreated by slaves when passing through farms. He laments the mismanagement of livestock, forced conscription, bribery in courts, prohibition of certain Muslim practices such as the wearing of veils by women and turbans by men, playing of music without legal purpose, and the dishonesty and excessive pride of their government officials (568-69).

The second, third, and fourth sections, which deal with Islamic governments, are significantly more positive in tone. Yet the praise of Muslim traditions is less explicit than the criticism of non-Muslim traditions in the first section, since they are chiefly concerned with explaining the duties of the ruler, the divisions of Muslim government, and a description of the Muslim treasury, rather than evaluating their ethicality (Hiskett, *Farq* 559, 569-72). While this document makes no reference to non-Muslim governments in the Americas, its highly propagandistic tone is likely to be applied to

other non-Muslim areas, especially those in which Muslims were actively engaged in, or planning, a *jihād*. An awareness of such practices in the pagan communities of West Africa and an awareness or assumption of similar practices in the West Indies were likely factors that caused Abū Bakr to feel that he had been corrupted, and which motivated his involvement in the *jihād* of 1832 in Jamaica.

Here, Abū Bakr's behavior corresponds with the both Western and Yoruba master tropes in several ways. His status as a highly valued, literate, and multi-lingual slave with ties to nobility in his country of origin reflects his status as a fetish or *nkisi*. His awareness of his unique value facilitated his ability to exploit it for his own benefit. It also foreshadowed his future empowerment as a slave and ultimately his emancipation, in keeping with the trajectories in the cycles of master tropes in both Western and Yoruba traditions. Abū Bakr functioned as a *nganga* in his attempt to restore the natural order within the Islamic community of Jamaica. In doing so, he challenged traditional relationships between "Old" Christians and "New" Christians—the latter of whom were often deliberate pretenders who created and nurtured a secret society and religion. He also challenged traditional relationships between masters and slaves, as is evident in his involvement in the slave rebellion of 1832. These changes, their effect on the power hierarchy in Jamaica, and Abū Bakr's covert role in them all correspond with the definition of *simbi* and shed light on Abū Bakr's role as both a challenger and a trickster.

3.15 Parallels of the *Nkisi* Fetish among Muslim Slaves

The use of *gris-gris* as a form of magical protection was common among African Muslims in Bahia, Brazil (Reis 127). Incidentally, they were also used by non-Muslims

(Reis 128). In addition to these amulets, Muslims in Bahia circulated papers written with Arabic letters, special rings, garb, and skull-caps in order to recognize one another (199). These techniques were particularly instrumental in the Male' Rebellion in Bahia, Brazil in 1835—described by one scholar as "the most effective urban slave rebellion ever to occur on the American continent" (Branche 67)—in which many slaves wore amulets with Qur'anic verses. Those who were illiterate could not comprehend the passages; yet they recognized the Arabic script and, by extension, their co-conspirators on whose amulets the script was found. Somewhat ironically, these amulets' role as a unifying means of identification even among illiterate Muslims illustrates how written Arabic could function as a form of symbolic—if non-verbal—communication. Since the script represented passages from the Qur'an, it is likely that even illiterate Muslims could recognize their recitation, pronounce them, and to a certain degree interpret their meaning. Thus their initial signifieds would already have been known. Yet in this context, verbal signifiers in the form of Arabic inscriptions acquired new, non-verbal, signifieds. Gates' observation that the absence of writing presumes a central role for a collective cultural memory regarding the role of the harlequin may also apply to Muslim slaves in this context (Gates, *Reader* 221). Indeed, it was their collective cultural memory of Qur'anic passages, acquired largely through rote repetition—much like the mimetic behavior of a harlequin—that allowed amulets to be effective tools of communication. In a further irony, the use of amulets also demonstrates that illiterate Muslim slaves took a linguistic sign that they only partially understood and used it to send messages that—at least on a literal level—were incomprehensible to the majority of literate Christians. As Branche observes, slaves, rather than literati, were the agents of fear regarding slave rebellions at

the foundational moment of Cuban literature in the 1830s (Branche 68). Their ability to reverse the role of a sign as a determinant of inclusivity or exclusivity is reminiscent of *simbi*'s reversal of *nkisi*. As the use of the *gris-gris* illustrates, slaves acquired this type of agency in non-literary contexts as well."

Amulets with Islamic inscriptions were by no means limited to the Male' Rebellion in Bahia, Brazil. They were also used by Muslim slaves in West Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States (Diouf 129-32). They are also mentioned in the fictional story, *Shehu Umar*, which is set in Africa. The characters in this book are ostensibly Muslim, yet some of them exhibit behaviors reminiscent of the Yoruba tradition. At one point in the story, two amulets were found in the undershirt of a dead man's robe. One amulet is covered with a leopard's forehead, while the other contains the skin of an electric catfish, and is sewn with monkey sinews. The second one is also wrapped in saki cloth, made with cotton material bearing a black and white check pattern (Balewa 45). While no explicit references are made to either the Yoruba or Santería traditions, the black and white check pattern is reminiscent of the markings of both the Yoruba trickster Eshu and the Ñañigo figure associated with Santería. Stephen Farrow acknowledges that an Islamic charm-book such as this one is both a type of fetish and an example of metonymy (Farrow 122). In this respect, it parallels the *nkisi* fetish of the Yoruba.

The *gris-gris* amulet bears other parallels with practical applications of *nkisi* and with traditions involving tricksters. Similar to a *nkisi*, certain types of Muslim *gris-gris* were transformed from one state of matter to another—a feature that made them less easily detectable and enhanced their supernatural aura. According to Sylviane Diouf, a

piece of paper with Arabic inscriptions could be placed into water, allowing the ink to dissolve, after which the client would wash himself with the mixture or drink it so that it—and by extension, its power—was absorbed into his body. A similar technique was sometimes used with writing on the type of wooden slates used in Qur'anic schools. In the words of a marabout in nineteenth-century Bahia, "The clean [slate] had already been washed of its letters..., so that the water could be drunk as a *mandinga*, but after it had been written on twenty times" (Diouf 129). People's attempts to absorb the power-bearing *logos* of *gris-gris* constitute an attempt to unify the message and the messenger comparable to attempts by *nganga* priests to mingle their blood with *nkisi* fetishes.

A parallel between the *gris-gris* and the trickster is seen in Diouf's description of an Ashanti king in the 1820s, who bore "a large white cloth which partly covered his left shoulder, [and] was studded all over with Arabic writing in various coloured inks" (Diouf 129). The visual effect of Arabic writing here is reminiscent of the checkered markings of the Yoruba trickster Legba and the Ñañigo figure of the Abakuá secret society in Cuba. The amassed *gris-gris* were doubly effective, due to the protection provided by their representation of a sacred text, and due to the emotional response that their visual replication of a folkloric trickster could create. Beyond this, the *gris-gris* could play a trickster-like function. A key component of its effectiveness as an identification symbol among Muslims was the concealment of its message from outsiders. For this reason, marabouts with a strong knowledge of Arabic sometimes wrote *gris-gris* in a deliberately confusing manner in order to preserve their secrets (119-20). Since any misrepresentation of the Qur'an is believed to invalidate it, this practice is counter-intuitive. That such misrepresentations were deliberately carried out by Muslim

marabouts is also surprising. More than most other texts, the Qur'an is valued by Muslims not only for the truth of its signified, but also for the authenticity of its signifier. Since many *gris-gris* were not intended to be read—and many that might have been read contained deliberate errors—the marabouts who constructed them may be said to prioritize the signifier over the signified. If the correctness of the signifier provides a foundation for the signified and for the religious practices that result, then an error in the signifier could jeopardize the validity of the entire semiotic matrix. While there are no concrete examples of syncretistic practices that resulted from the alteration of *gris-gris*' messages, it would be logical to expect such a result. In any case, it is evident that *gris-gris* fulfilled trickster-like functions at different discursive levels ranging from changes in individual letters and words, to the intangible empowerment of humans via absorption or consumption, to the aggregate, non-literary effect of their placement en masse on clothing.

3.16 The Symbolic Function of Literacy in Arabic Among Muslim Slaves

Literacy among Muslim slaves was a complicated issue, both in its formation and in its reception by whites. While even the most basic literacy distinguished them from most slaves, their literacy in Arabic tended to be rudimentary. This was particularly true with slaves for whom Arabic was a foreign language. Since more common native languages of Muslim slaves such as Hausa, Foulah, Wolof, and Mandingo lacked writing systems of their own, they were eventually transcribed in the Arabic script. Mandingo was the native language of the protagonist of *The Fortunate Slave: An Illustration of African Slavery in the Early Eighteenth Century* and Hausa was the native language of

Abū Bakr (Grant 18; Wilks 150). Although some slaves knew certain words and phrases in Arabic based on their familiarity with the Qur'an, their limited proficiency often led to grammatical and orthographical errors, thus impeding the comprehensibility of their writing. This is likely one reason for the simplified and, at times, awkward wording of Abū Bakr's narrative and of the letters written by him and Kaba. Since the ambiguity of a signifier yields further uncertainty regarding its signifieds, a word's literal meaning yields an indeterminacy regarding its author's intent. While contextual clues sometimes guide a reader in deciphering an unclear word, its interpretation still relies on conjecture—a process that may lead to misrepresentation. However, indeterminacy and misrepresentation could actually be beneficial to slaves. Examples of this include slaves' use of Arabic for secret communications that would not be understood by whites, and marabouts' use of unclear orthography in the construction of *gris-gris*.

While linguistic syncretism was common between Arabic and West-African languages, it was criticized on the basis of a lack of natural correspondence between the Semitic alphabet of Arabic and the non-Semitic phonemes of the languages being transliterated (Robinson 251). A similar lack of correspondence between Arabic and Portuguese phonemes was observed by al-Baġdādī in Brazil among the Muslims who grew up as slaves without Arabic instruction. Although this dilemma is a linguistic one, it carries religious overtones. This is evident in al-Baġdādī's reference to the Portuguese alphabet as “the Frank letters” (al-Baġdādī 13), using the epithet “Franks” to refer to infidels and, thus, implying a corrupting influence of the Portuguese—or any Latin-based—alphabet on the interpretation of the Qur'an.

Other scholars indicated that, in spite of the small volume, the use of *ajamiyya*

scripts—systems of writing other languages based on the Arabic alphabet—had a critical pedagogical function for the spread of Islam (Robinson 251). In Northern Nigeria, ‘Uthmān dan Fodio recognized the need to increase the level of understanding of Islamic faith among the Fulbe in the late eighteenth century before waging a *jihād*. In Futa Jallon and Futa Toro during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *ajamiyya* scripts played a similarly important role (252, 255). By the mid-nineteenth century, the movement from Futa Toro—which depended heavily on Fulfulde pedagogical literature written in the *ajamiyya* script—had become a successful military *jihād* and eventually paved the way for Shehu Ahmadu’s installation as caliph. Interestingly, the first line of the English translation of the *ajami* poem praising the military feats of Sheikh Umar, Shehu Ahmadu's military leader—“He shouted out instructions, settled in, made religion pure” (256)—suggests that the authenticity of the Islamic teachings enabled by Umar's battlefield victories was not diminished by the inevitable heteroglossia resulting from the use of the *ajamiyya* script.

As a distinguishing feature, literacy was not without disadvantages. Since literacy in most languages in the nineteenth century was thought to be a trait unique to whites, it could be used against slaves by facilitating their capture. This caveat regarding literacy also existed in slaveholding societies outside of the Caribbean. For example, in South Carolina, an ad in the Charleston Courier on February 7, 1805 mentioned an escaped slave named Sambo who was literate in Arabic (Diouf 107). One reason that whites, many of whom were illiterate themselves, were so prone to notice literacy among blacks was that it clashed with the stereotypical image of the illiterate black. Many whites were opposed to the literacy of Africans because it refuted their beliefs that the latter were

inherently inferior. For this reason, many North Americans denied the Africanness of distinguished Muslims by referring to them as Arabs, even if they were not of Arab descent (Diouf 109). One example is the protagonist of the North American slave narrative, *Jallon, Arabic Prince of Old Natchez (1788-1828)*, by James Register. The protagonist, referred to in the narrative as Abduhl Ibrahim Rahahman [sic], was born in Timbuktu, like Abū Bakr (Register 15). While he used an Arabic name and is indicated to be of Arabic identity in his narrative's title, no Arabic ancestry is provided. For Muslim slaves, literacy was a valuable tool that aided the process of voluntary assimilation and, in many cases, manumission. Yet it did so by obscuring their African identity. Similar to amulets with Arabic writing, which served as identity markers even for illiterate Muslims, literacy among Muslim slaves paralleled the Yoruba trope of *simbi* by serving as a verbal signifier that yielded a non-verbal signified.

3.17 Literacy as a Form of *Àshe*—The Power to Make Things Happen

A key factor in any autobiographical account is the function of language as a means of self-expression. In slave narratives, this function is maintained since, on both practical and symbolic levels, such texts provide a means of expression that is otherwise largely inaccessible. From the eighteenth through the twentieth century, illiteracy was used as a basis for prejudice and discrimination against people of African origin. Some people viewed it as an innate and unalterable feature, while others went to great lengths to impose it as a means of control. While it was rarely stated, many members of the ruling class in Europe and the Americas recognized literacy as an instrument by which

minorities could accrue power. It was partly for this reason that so many sought to exploit its denial as a means of subjugation and difference.

While the fear of the black is evident in the writings of at least three well known Cuban writers of the 1830s—Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, la Condesa de Merlin, and Plácido, the only one of these who suffered as a result was Plácido. Given his status as a mulatto, he was perceived as a subversive element and his writings were more likely to inspire fear among whites of a slave uprising (Camacho, *Fantasmas* 687). It may be concluded that the reception of his message is due in part to the manner in which his writing was perceived by readers. It shows that, beyond his own authorial intent, the interpretation of his text was influenced by his interlocutors' perception of his relationship as a signifier with his signified text. In esthetic terms, white readers viewed Plácido as a type of trickster, in a role approximating *simbi*, since they feared his ability to reverse the relationship between signifier and signified. The content of his writing aside, his mere literacy inspired fear since it was not commonly expected among non-whites. Thus, as a literate mulatto, he constituted a new type of signifier in white readers' minds. As a refutation of the white perception of non-whites as illiterate, and an activation of something that had previously been considered passive, Plácido closely corresponded with the esthetic function of *simbi*.

The fear of literacy among slaves was prevalent in the United States as well. Below is an excerpt from a 1740 South Carolina statute aimed at impeding their literacy:

And whereas the having of slave taught to write or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attending with great inconveniences; *Be it enacted*, that all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach, or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter aught to write; every such person or

persons shall, for every offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money (Gates, *Reader* 219).

While written accounts of slaves' experiences became more numerous in the nineteenth century, significant restrictions were still present. Narratives of former slaves published in the United States during this time were carefully edited and supervised by white American abolitionists. They aimed to convey a general rather than individual experience of slavery. In the words of Francis Smith Foster: "If we recall that slave narratives were meant to be personal accounts of ex-slaves' struggles for freedom which were also written to expose the perfidy of slavery, the tension between the depiction of the protagonist as individual and the protagonist as every slave becomes obvious" (245). Many scholars have said that the stories of slaves become subjects while the former slaves remain objects. Escaping from slavery did not always grant autonomy over one's writing. Former slaves in the United States often needed sponsorship from a white benefactor to publish for a long time after slavery. These benefactors had strong ideas about appropriate roles for blacks in American literary and intellectual life, and about their roles in their own emancipation. As a result, the written versions of their stories were highly stylized and yielded a particular kind of slave character (245).

Three influential nineteenth century thinkers—Hegel, Hume and Kant—all purported that blacks' alleged lack of history was due to their lack of writing system (Gates, *Reader* 220). In Hume's essay: "Of National Characters" (1748), he discusses traits of the world's major types of humans. In a footnote added in 1753, he states:

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, *no arts, no sciences*.... Such a uniform and constant difference

could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made our original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are Negroe slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity.... In Jamaica, indeed they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning [Francis Williams, the Cambridge-educated poet who wrote verse in Latin]; but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly (qtd. in Gates, *Figures* 18).

Hegel identifies the absence of writing among blacks as the most fundamental difference between them and whites. He claims that we are unable to know the African character because the African himself has not shown the ability to make it “objective,” either by showing a consciousness of an absolute Being that is higher than his individual self, or by expressing the ultimate sign of human self-awareness—writing history. In this regard, he echoes both Hume and Kant (19). He claims that the African is grounded in the prison of particularity because the black consciousness has not yet reached the awareness of an objective existence, in which he acknowledges himself and his own will (20). Hegel's relegation of black mentality to a "prison of particularity" matches the metaphoric stage in the cycle of master tropes, which corresponds with the lowest level of awareness. Africans' alleged inability to conceive in a de-centered manner of a higher absolute being—a universal whole of which Africans would constitute a part—appears to forestall their ascendance to levels of metonymic and synecdochic thought. The lack of esthetic independence in African art parallels the inability to formalize a linguistic code of representation, a trait which White associates with synecdoche (White, *Tropics* 73). The supposed ignorance of an objective existence, and lack self-awareness or awareness of one's own will preclude acquisition of an ironic frame of mind. Hegel further criticizes Africans by claiming that they lack feeling and moral sentiments, and that their “fetiches” lack any “aesthetic independence as a work of art.” He further criticizes Africans by

claiming that they have no culture and that only “Mahommedanism” (Islam) appears to have been able to provide this for them (Gates, *Figures* 20).

One reason for the eventual prohibition against importing Africans who had been influenced by Islam was the higher rate of literacy among its followers. On May 11, 1526, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V cautioned against introducing Wolofs or other blacks who had been brought up with Moors. In an order of September 28, 1532, he justified this on the basis that such blacks were considered responsible for the uprisings and damage in the Island of San Juan, in addition to his opinion that they were arrogant, disobedient, rebellious and incorrigible (Diggs 417). While literacy existed among both Muslim and non-Muslim slaves, it was more common among the former. This reinforced the stereotypical association between Islam and literacy. Literacy was perceived not only as a tool of agency and empowerment but also as a sign of rebelliousness.

On a semiotic level, the tendency to subvert authority has important associations with the theory of tropes. While each signifier is potentially subversive through its inevitable yielding of a different signified, the disparity between signifier and signified tends to be greater for tropes that are more abstract. Tropes that are less abstract do not necessarily have less representational freedom than those that are more abstract; yet they may be said to have more randomness. In this sense, their potential meanings are less predetermined by existing connections. A trope's level of abstraction is directly proportional to its degree of complexity. The acquisition of higher levels of abstraction is facilitated by intertextual connections—new textual components and creators in the cases of *nkisi*, *nganga* and *simbi*; and new allusions and revisions through the Western tropes of metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. Yet these very connections form a network of

meanings, any of which may be signified. While even the more abstract tropes still possess an element of randomness in their signification, it is essentially a randomness of choice from options that are largely predetermined and limited by existing networks of meaning. While such tropes do grant an increasing degree of power, in some ways they are more restrictive than those that are less abstract. In this respect, they echo observations made about language by the Spanish scholar Antonio Nebrija, who considered grammar to be the system behind all imperial systems. His book of grammar allegedly served to conquer enemies, standardize rights and responsibilities of citizens, achieve diplomacy with those in accordance with the rules, and to subjugate through indoctrination both citizens and slaves. In his view, all people, whether ostensibly slave or free were enslaved to the system that legitimized them, even if this system was merely a linguistic one (Piedra, *Literary* 306). Those who became proficient in such a system were authenticated and empowered, if not entirely liberated. For those who did not, their participation and membership in language-based semiotic networks was repudiated.

Houston A. Baker, Jr. and Robert Burns Stepto have identified “authentication” and “repudiation” respectively as metaphors of literary history. Both critics have developed metaphors of literary history that are implicitly ideological and antagonistic (Gates, *Figures* 48). In a general sense, authentication may correspond with metaphor and synecdoche given these tropes' predominantly positive connotations, while repudiation may match metonymy and irony due to their negative connotations. Yet, on a deeper level, both repudiation and authentication may correspond with all four tropes in different ways. The simultaneous occurrence of repudiation and authentication is reminiscent of the idea of a trial by fire, in which the acknowledgement of an entity's

profane nature constitutes repudiation, while its purification is a form of authentication. The colors black and white could also have associations with repudiation and authentication respectively, since black is commonly associated with evil, guilt, and death, while white is often paired with good, innocence and life. Gates even suggests that Signifyin(g) is dependent on intertextuality. Intertextual Signifyin(g) relations may be found in the discourse of the black Other in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This includes both literature created by blacks as well as non-black literature about black characters (Gates, *Figures* 49). The slave's narrative genre was strongly influenced by black discourse, the sentimental novel, and the American changes rendered upon the European picaresque. So-called illegitimate slave narratives were essentially novels that refigured tropes and conventions of both historical texts and novels, even though they are disguised as first-person slave narratives (50). Gates' rhetorical portrayal of the concepts of blackness, repudiation and authentication in their literary applications may be compared with their function in the classification of race. In a sense, the racial classification systems of both Old and New Worlds were based on an agonic struggle between forces of repudiation manifest in the separation of black and white systems and people, and the denial of their equality; and those of authentication via the incorporation of both systems and people along with the acknowledgement of their parity.

The process of socio-economic ascendancy in slave-holding societies, while dependent partly on both physical appearance and economic power, also relied on people's ability to portray themselves as something other than who they really were. Mastery of cultural mores could provide a type of authentication necessary for people of African descent to be accepted by lighter-skinned peers. However, they were essentially

practicing a form of signification by utilizing culture and education to send what were at least partially erroneous messages about race. In keeping with observations about the representational freedom of different tropes, to create a more convincing impression of assimilation, African diaspora needed to acquire greater familiarity with and proficiency in networks of meaning used by the group with which they wished to assimilate. In this sense, their thought and behavior became increasingly abstract in keeping with the progression of tropes. As they sought to assimilate with higher socio-economic levels, the expectations of their enculturation became more stringent. Yet their ongoing association with blackness, which represented the antithetical extreme of whiteness in terms of both race and rhetorical abstraction, allowed a freedom of signification more commonly associated with metaphor. This is not to say that black thought possessed less rhetorical abstraction than white thought, for it did not. However, it was generally perceived as less abstract and simpler by people who were not affiliated with it. While vacillation between white and black cultures—and ironic and metaphoric modes of signification—may have hindered African-Americans' goal of full assimilation into white culture, their continued association with the metaphoric mode allowed greater freedom of movement between the two systems than was enjoyed by most whites. In effect, it granted them greater freedom of signification. Yet this freedom was ambiguous in that it limited the roles for blacks in expressional freedom. Black characters served as fictional mediators for ideas that were too daring for whites (Piedra, *Literary* 311). Yet this function was largely limited to texts written by whites. Two well-known examples are the title character in William Shakespeare's play *Othello* and the fictional Moorish author Cide Hamete Benengali in Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Less well known, but

equally important, examples include the Arabization of Muslim slaves in the Americas for the purpose of making their literacy—and liminality—more palatable to whites. While non-whites could be utilized to address controversial topics in texts written by white authors, they were not supposed to address the issue of difference in their own writing (Piedra, *Literary* 312). The re-naming with Arabic names for the purpose of legitimizing slave authors in the Americas presents an interesting contrast to the prohibition of Arabic names for many slaves in the Middle East.

It was in the trials of the Inquisition that black writers found their first forum for literary criticism (Piedra, *Literary* 313). Yet even for blacks whose writing ability was acknowledged by the white literary establishment, other means were used to deny them full admission into the semiotic network. Non-whites in general were relegated to a racially safe mid-point by the racial tag "moreno," which alluded to Moorish heritage and, due to its ambiguous connotations of both conqueror and the conquered, was ostensibly neutral (316). As soon as lower class citizens showed basic proficiency in Spanish, they were given the uniform label of "ladinos," a title which disregarded race, creed, national origin, and civil status (313). Given the theatrical nature of inquisitorial trials in which the largely predetermined outcomes could influence the events that led up to them, the trials themselves constituted a reversal of the relationship between signifier and signified. Like the corresponding Yoruba trope *simbi*, the trials fulfilled a trickster-like function of maintaining the status quo on behalf of a power-holding class who feared racial, cultural, religious and linguistic contamination. Yet, ironically, they also provided an audience for—and foreshadowed the gradual, if limited, assimilation of—the very people whom they sought to exclude.

Gates notes that blacks have tended to be theory-resistant in literature due to limitations placed on them by whites (Gates, *Figures* 27). In his view, blackness is not an object or an absolute, but a trope. It does not have an “essence” but is defined by a network of relations forming a specific esthetic unity. He adds that even slave narratives are systems of signs (40). His identification of blackness as a trope, particularly one defined by a network of relations, is in keeping with his naming of the Signifying Monkey as the predominant trope in black expression. Among rhetorical tropes, the Signifying Monkey corresponds most closely with *simbi* and irony. Yet since each of these tropes constitutes the apex of its respective cycle of master tropes, they necessarily rely on—and are bound by—intertextual connections. Blacks' resistance to white-dominated theoretical systems may largely be an attempt to avert further semiotic subjugation. It illustrates an ironic capacity, but still maintains a metaphoric simplicity and flexibility.

3.18 Degrees of Agency and Their Dependence on Tricksters and Tropes

Like the other two slave narratives, “Routes in North Africa by Abū Bekr eṣ ṣiddīk” [sic] should be evaluated in terms of agency. Abū Bakr's agency may be observed both its discursive treatment in his narrative and in the historical reality which it influenced. While the narrative does not adhere entirely to the cycle of master tropes proposed by White, it still bears certain parallels, some of which relate to the topic of agency. The formist mode of explanation, which corresponds with the trope of metaphor, is used throughout most of the narrative to describe Abū Bakr's travels, first with his father, and then with his teacher, up to the point of his capture and enslavement. Formist

explanations tend to emphasize agents, agencies, and acts (White, *Metahistory* 14). Such emphasis can be seen in the portrayal of Abū Bakr's great grandfather as the family patriarch and the possible founder of his race in the country of Jenne, as well as in the references to his father's political posts (Wilks 158). Agency can also be seen in the efforts of Abū Bakr's father to reconcile with his brothers, as well as by his own efforts to learn about his father and to visit his father's grave.

Abū Bakr's efforts correspond with the first Yoruba trope—*ndoki*—in that they serve to materialize a relationship between the known and the unknown. After alluding to his father's death on a trip to Bouna, he says, "At the time I was a child; I knew nothing of this, but some of my old relations told me all about the life of my departed father" (Wilks 159). Aside from fulfilling an emotional need of connecting with a parent, the importance of ancestry in both African and Muslim traditions likely motivated Abū Bakr to reestablish a connection with a father whom he did not know. His efforts also foreshadow the second Yoruba trope—*nkisi*—by attempting to secure a link between himself and ancestors from whom he derives much of his identity. Along with his status as a Muslim, his identity as part of a family of nobles and scholars helped to distinguish him from other slaves, to acquire more dignified and less physically demanding jobs, and to put him in contact with influential people who might facilitate his emancipation. Given that Islam was forbidden in Jamaica and could not be talked about openly with masters, these other aspects of his identity became all the more important.

Abū Bakr's own agency is touched on, if only superficially, in the last two sections of his narrative, where the predominant tropes are synecdoche and irony—the third and fourth tropes in the Western cycle. However, instead of a clear succession from

synecdoche to irony, there is an overlap of the two tropes and of their corresponding modes of explanation, modes of emplotment, and ideological paradigms. The diachronic narration—sometimes associated with synecdoche—used in earlier sections to describe Abū Bakr’s travels is interspersed with a synchronic description—sometimes associated with irony—of his suffering as a slave and his Muslim piety (White, *Metahistory* 15). The transition from a diachronic style to a synchronic one also corresponds theoretically with a shift in mode of emplotment from comedy to satire, which may be present in the aporia-like juxtaposition of the expectations of faithful Muslims with Abū Bakr’s own confession of corruption (White, *Metahistory* 37; Wilks 163)

However, certain elements that correspond with comedy—organicism and synecdoche—are still present. Organicism portrays particular details in a historical context as parts of a synthetic process and tends to view individual entities as elements of wholes that are greater than or different from the sum of their parts (White, *Metahistory* 15). The organicist mode—through its emphasis on principles—and the trope of synecdoche—through classification (16)—can be seen in Abū Bakr’s synthetic listing of different Muslim rules: “say the five prayers; fast every year in the month of Ramadan; give alms as ordained in the law” (Wilks 162). This mode can also be seen in Abū Bakr’s classification of Muslims as separate from people of other religions—“they do not keep company with those whose faith is contrary to theirs, such as worshippers of idols, men who swear falsely by the name of the Lord, who dishonor their parents” (163)—and his self-identification as a member of the Muslim community. Optimism—another key trait of organicism and comedy is present here as well, in Abū Bakr’s confidence in God’s omnipotence, in his faith that the tenets of Islam are possible to maintain, and in his

entreaty to God for guidance in the final sentence of the narrative: "Verily I have erred and done wickedly, but I entreat God to guide my heart in the right path, for He knoweth what is in my heart, and whatever can be pleaded in my behalf" (Wilks 162-63). In keeping with organicism, his final comments imply that his religious piety may help him to fulfill the 'telos' of emancipation (White, *Metahistory* 15-16). Indeed, his Muslim piety played a role in his emancipation, both overtly in its positive impression on Madden and other readers of his narrative, and covertly through his involvement in the slave rebellion of 1832. Thus, a certain degree of the faith-based agency that is modestly suggested at the end of his narrative is ultimately achieved.

Abū Bakr's optimism is present in the hoped for, yet unspoken possibility of reversing the system in which he is a slave (White, *Tropics* 9). His mindset, ironic in this context, implies his critical perspective regarding the operations and structures of the first three meta-tropes—metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. His new understanding of oppression constitutes a negation of the metaphoric innocence associated with his adolescent perception of his distinguished family and privileged education. It also refutes the causal relationship associated with metonymy, which, when placed in the context of his biological and educational lineages, would lead him to expect an outcome of continued good fortune. He realizes that his success in dealing with the problem of his enslavement depends on his own actions, rather than on those of his forbearers. In a similar manner, the hierarchical values that Abū Bakr associated with different tribal names in North Africa and the social distinctions which he observed between literacy and illiteracy, and between free and enslaved people—all of which constitute forms of synecdoche—are altered in the context of his enslavement. Still, his identity as a Muslim

and his literacy in Arabic continue to enhance his social status in Jamaica (White, *Tropics* 9). Literacy, in particular, grants him a type of liminality that enhances his power within the formal structure of slavery and his agency in the collective attempt by Jamaican Muslims to rebel against this structure. One example of this is the warning letter to oppressive Christian slaveholders, which he helped to write (Diouf 96; Madden, *West Indies* 140-41). It warns that those who oppress the poor will suffer in the afterlife, and claims that the Pharaoh who oppressed the children of Israel will be burned from head to foot seven times a day for all of eternity (Madden, *West Indies* 140-41).

While his narrative may have engendered sympathy from readers, most notably Richard Robert Madden, the agency which he achieved through it was qualified by Madden's response, since his emancipation was contingent upon his purchase by Madden. The value of Abū Bakr's labor to his master, Alexander Anderson, was said to be so great that the latter initially resisted selling him to Madden on the basis that he could not be recompensed (Gomez 57, 61; Madden, *West Indies* 123-25). Even prior to his purchase by Madden, Abū Bakr had officially begun his transition to freedom as evident in his status as an apprentice. In spite of this nominal transition, his conditions in the years immediately following his emancipation were little improved from those of his slavery. He continued to work at the same job, but according to Renouard, his employer withdrew some of his former indulgences without giving wages in their place (Renouard 108). Abū Bakr's own letter to Kaba appears to contradict this by portraying Anderson as a faithful, good, and merciful master (Madden, *West Indies* 136-37; Wilks 165). However, his praise of Anderson may be based more on his fear of reprisal than on historical fact. It is not until Abū Bakr is removed from the plantation environment entirely, in preparation

for his return to Africa that his status notably improves. Even at this point, during many of the stops along his trip he is regarded largely as a novelty, rather than as a person worthy of dignity equal to that of whites.

In terms of ideological implication, Abū Bakr's conclusion seems to support anarchism. Thinkers of the anarchist paradigm tend to idealize the remote past of natural-human innocence from which they claim to have been corrupted. One parallel may be seen in the manner in which Abū Bakr idealizes his childhood and adolescence in Africa. Other parallels may be inferred from his description of the community of faithful Muslims and his confession of corruption (Madden, *West Indies* 129-30; Renouard 106-07; Wesley 55; Wilks 163). Further, anarchist thinkers project the idea of utopia onto a non-temporal plane and do not believe in the legitimacy of the current establishment (White, *Metahistory* 25). Abū Bakr's religious commentary seems to suggest that utopia may be achieved by spiritual means in a manner independent of the external environment. Anarchism also corresponds with the romantic mode of emplotment. White claims that romance is essentially a drama of self-identification, as seen in the hero's transcendence of and liberation from the world of experience (8). He also portrays the mode of romance as a struggle culminating in the victory of good over evil. This struggle, and the accompanying process of self-identification, are implicit in Abū Bakr's summary of Muslim law that he and other Muslims intend to obey even during their oppression, and in his belief that God will ultimately guide him along the right path (9). The narrative may be interpreted as a *bildungsroman*, whose culmination is signaled by a shift from earthly to spiritual matters in its conclusion. This shift marks a greater awareness—in

keeping with the culminating trope of irony—and a new beginning—implicit in the return from irony to metaphor when the cycle of tropes is renewed.

Given the associations of anarchist ideology and romantic emplotment with the initial trope of metaphor, it may be tempting to assume that Abū Bakr's spiritual commentary at the end of his narrative marks the beginning of a new cycle of tropes, and to interpret this as a sign of his agency. Conversely, his self-critical conceptualization makes it possible to interpret his final commentary in an ironic manner (White, *Metahistory* 37). Although not yet known at the time of his narrative's composition or initial publication, neither his literacy nor his spiritual piety would prevent his capture and re-enslavement after his return to Africa (Madden, *West Indies* 158-59). While his interim emancipation temporarily overrides his narrative's conclusion, his re-enslavement annuls his emancipation and calls his agency into question. It also recalls the struggle between ideological irony and epistemological irony by juxtaposing—and in some cases, superimposing—elements of different master tropes in the narrative's conclusion to the extent that no trope takes precedence. Further, the different, and sometimes conflicting, details and interpretations provided by each trope illustrate the inability of any single trope to provide a completely accurate account. Of course, Abū Bakr's agency is not entirely dependent on his own freedom. It may also be measured by his effect on other people. His involvement in the Jamaican slave rebellion of 1832 helped bring about the Emancipation Act of 1833 (Afroz, *Invincible* 214). That this law was facilitated by Madden, in his capacity as a Special Magistrate, provides further evidence that Abū Bakr's narrative garnered sympathy that ultimately contributed to general emancipation.

Abū Bakr's agency must also be viewed in light of other forces. These include both specific human agents such as Madden and more generic entities such as the institution of slavery and its long-lasting influence. Madden's agency is evident in the letters he wrote to convince J. Buckingham of the British Parliament to allow the purchase of Abū Bakr, as well as in Madden's subsequent purchase and emancipation of him (Madden, *West Indies* 157, 177-82). On a broader scale, Madden—particularly through the letters published in his memoirs—was thought to be instrumental in terminating the apprenticeship system through which slaves were granted partial freedom over a period of years to facilitate their transition into free society (Burton, *Ambivalence* 29; Madden, *West Indies* 193-215).

Yet Madden's writing contains a trickster-like element. Madden appears to blame the system of slavery primarily on white slave traders, while downplaying the role of Africans who initially captured and sold the slaves. In his letter to Buckingham, dated September 15, 1834, he concocts an imaginary conversation between a black slave and white master in which the slave provides an explanation for his enslavement:

Reverend sir, when we fight in Africa, reason has nothing to do with our warfare, and humanity has just as little to say to the seizure of our enemies; for if we spare our prisoners, it is because we mean to sell them to your people; and if we go to war with our neighbors, it is because you Christians on the coast are always ready to buy them up: but I beg to assure you, there would be no wars amongst us if there were no white men to buy the captives, for the sake of which advantage our marauding excursions are undertaken.” (Madden, *West Indies* 114)

This fictive conversation may have been considered anachronistic, due to its attribution of reasoning and persuasive powers—and thus the potential for agency—to an African and a slave. It is also illustrative of Madden's own aspiration towards agency and of his willingness to compromise the truth regarding historical facts for the purpose of ending

the slave trade. His parody of a slave's explanation may symbolize an elimination of the disparity between slave and master by granting a voice to the slave, and by suggesting the slave's complicity—and, thus, his agency—in perpetuating slavery. However, if the slave's words are taken as sincere, they may perpetuate misinformation by suggesting that the burden of responsibility be shifted from Africans to non-Africans. Considering these two interpretations, the slave's utterance may be viewed as an ironic confession by an African under the guise of a metaphoric condemnation of non-Africans.

Although there was a symbiotic relationship between warring African nations and white traders to whom they sold slaves, as alluded to in Abū Bakr's own narrative, the capture and enslavement of one group of Africans by another was hardly dependent on white buyers. The descriptions in Abū Bakr's narrative and in the letter written to him by his acquaintance Kaba attest to the possession of slaves by their own families (Gomez 59; Madden, *West Indies* 127, 135; Wilks 159, 164). Other accounts confirm the abundance of slaves in Africa as well. In nineteenth-century Bornu, where Abū Bakr once lived, slaves were needed to replenish losses due to drought, famine, epidemic, and war. A Hausa traveler, who had himself been a slave during this period, commented, "The country of Bornu—I am telling the truth—is a country of slaves" (Segal 94). Various sources attest that warfare in Africa was often conducted for the purpose of acquiring slaves, many of which would later be sold to non-Africans; yet this does not place the burden of moral responsibility entirely on future buyers. On the contrary, it shows that those who waged war with this goal in mind were complicit and equally at fault. One important source that acknowledged the intra-continental enslavement of Africans by other Africans is the Condesa de Merlin, who saw slavery as a lesser evil that rescued

slaves from worse fates of being killed or enslaved by other African tribes. In effect, she converts the slave through his suffering into the redeemer of his own crime (Camacho, *Fantasmas* 681). Madden's parody of Africans' complicity in the trade may be a subtle indication of his agreement with la Condesa regarding their culpability. Yet it also comments subtly on the expressive potential of both Africans and non-Africans. If an African slave may not only speak, but do so in a multivalent way with different meanings intended for different audiences, it attributes to him high intelligence and communicative efficacy. Yet due to the fictionalized nature of both this slave and his utterance, the more powerful communicator here is Madden himself. The combined metaphoricity and irony of his statement about the blame for slavery renders its true meaning ambiguous. Further, his attribution of the statement to a fictional slave portrays the latter as a dishonest trickster who, even if capable of higher thought, is limited by his immorality. Madden may seek to overshadow his own complicity in the perpetuation of an anti-African stereotype. Yet in doing so, he reflects and reinforces his own trickster-like function.

To determine the degree of agency achieved and its relation to the trickster function via the publication of Abū Bakr's narrative, it is necessary to consider his authorial intentions, the editorial intentions of Madden, and the potential conflicts between them. In light of the historical, religious, and literary milieus of West Africa in the decades surrounding Abū Bakr's enslavement—in particular the influence of Uthmān dan Fodio, whose manifesto called for a slave rebellion in the Americas—it is possible that Abū Bakr was motivated at least partly by a desire to further this cause (Afroz, *Jihad* 232; Renouard 103). There is no direct evidence of factual error by Abū Bakr. Nevertheless, his narrative's emphasis on his piety as a Muslim is antithetical to his

baptism as Edward Donellan by his first master Haynes (Wilks 155), to his church membership, to his request to Madden for Christian paraphernalia, and to the references to his alleged conversion to Christianity in Madden's memoirs.

Since he was freed in 1834 as a result of negotiations between his owner and Madden, and both the first version of his narrative and the letter in which Kaba congratulates him on obtaining his freedom were published in the same year, there is no direct evidence that the narrative's publication influenced his own emancipation. Any influence that it might have had in this regard would have been limited to Madden and Anderson, in the event that the former used it to convince the latter to free Abū Bakr (Wilks 155-56). Nor would the publication of his narrative have directly influenced the broader issue of emancipation, since it occurred in the year after the Emancipation Act of 1833. However, his narrative may have influenced subsequent slave rebellions such as the Bahia Rebellion in Brazil in 1835 and the rebellion aboard the slave ship *Amistad* in 1839. Given Madden's role as a Special Magistrate in Jamaica and his connections with the British Parliament, it is also possible that Abū Bakr's narrative played an indirect role in expediting parliamentary measures to abolish slavery throughout the British Empire, a process that lasted from 1834-1838 (Postma xviii). Madden was aware of the evasive tactics used by some slaves in their interactions with whites, as seen in his descriptions of Abū Bakr, Kaba, other historical personages, and in his satirical portrayal of the stereotypical "litigious" negro who regulates disagreements both among slaves and between slaves and masters. This figure's vacillation between obsequiousness when dealing with masters, and dissatisfaction and rebelliousness when dealing with fellow slaves, is reminiscent of the trickster who adapts his message based on his audience

(Madden, *West Indies* 103-04). More specifically, the “litigious” negro may parallel the Afro-Caribbean meta-trope *simbi* by subsuming the conflict between ideological irony and epistemological irony. His hostile relations with other slaves are reminiscent of epistemological irony's renunciation of preceding metaphoric, metonymic, synecdochic, and ironic ideologies. Conversely, his feigned loyalty towards masters, which may be interpreted in an esthetic sense as his feigned acceptance of their ideological paradigms, is necessary in order for epistemological irony to maintain its effectiveness.

Yet Madden himself adapts Abū Bakr's message both through editing and remembrance in his own memoirs—a document that, while abolitionist, was still clearly racist. In this sense, Madden's stance echoes that of his colleague, Domingo del Monte, in regard to race, slavery, and the discursive exploitation of the Other's texts. Among numerous references to the alleged inferiority of blacks made by Madden and others, Abū Bakr stands out as a noble exception in terms of behavior, literacy, religion, and ethnic affiliation. Yet his achievements are inevitably colored by Madden through his comparison with others of African descent. As evident in his genealogy and the description of his teachers, Abū Bakr sought to minimize the role of blackness in the shaping of his identity. Yet Madden—who, as his confidante, interim owner, and emancipator, had the greatest influence over Abū Bakr among his translators—repeatedly sought to reinforce it, ultimately relegating him to a free, but inferior, status. Evidence of Abū Bakr's agency may be seen both in his temporary manumission, his involvement in the Jamaican slave rebellion of 1832, and his influence—albeit indirect—in the expedition of slavery's abolition throughout the British Empire. His association with the slave rebellion as a Muslim under the guise of a conversion to Christianity is the

achievement that most obviously depended on his role as a trickster. Yet the degree of his involvement in this event is uncertain. His written autobiography played a greater role in realizing the other two achievements; and it is through the analysis of this document, in light of both the master tropes and the Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes, that the subtle role of the trickster and its semiotic power become more apparent.

Chapter 4

Esteban Montejo: Inveterate Signifiers and The Guardianship of the Sign

4.1 The Use of African Rhetorical Devices as a Means of Cultural Survival

The testimonial novel *Biografía de un cimarrón* by Miguel Barnet is an account of the life of a former slave that is intended to serve as a repository for the subaltern Afro-Cuban memory and as a foil for the hegemonic Cuban political memory which might otherwise silence blacks' account. In effect, it challenges the traditional Western historical canon both in form and content by promoting an Afro-Cuban canon that portrays a segment of Cuban history from a new perspective and through the use of non-Western techniques. Together, Barnet and his subject Esteban Montejo succeed in portraying the experience of slaves in Cuba from a new perspective. In doing so, they demonstrate both the survival of certain African rhetorical techniques and their efficacy in perpetuating the historical conscience of marginalized peoples. By extension, they challenge the hegemonic historical conscience of Cuba by attempting to subvert it with a subaltern historical conscience from the perspective of a former slave. However, they also raise important questions regarding authorship, accuracy, intent, and agency. While the authorship and accuracy of *Biografía* has already been commented on to a substantial degree in extant scholarly writing, less has been said about the intent and agency of the two men who collaborated in its composition. This chapter aims to show that, while both men's aims were somewhat dissimilar—and, to a degree, counterproductive, each one still achieved a measure of agency through the testimonial novel's publication.

It should also show how parallels between the creative process and four Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes may grant Montejo a greater degree of authorship and agency than has been previously assumed.

While the factual accuracy of the text is undoubtedly compromised by the insertion of fictional elements, its symbolic accuracy in terms of Afro-Caribbean traditions may be largely intact. This will be demonstrated through an analysis of the four meta-tropes—*ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, *simbi*—their correspondence both with the four master tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony—and with the process of composing a testimonial novel. This chapter will also evaluate the narrative's truth claim and the degree of agency that it affords Montejo and Barnet. It will also address the role of the Yoruba trickster as a metaphor for creative and interpretative processes, and for cultural survival on the part of the subaltern. The trickster figure is instrumental in all three slave narratives; yet its influence is most tangible in that of Montejo. This is partly due to the stronger influence in Montejo's daily life of the Yoruba religion—via its outgrowth, Santería—from which the most prominent Afro-Cuban trickster figures are derived. It can be seen in Montejo's numerous descriptions of Santería culture in Cuba, some of which contain explicit references to Afro-Caribbean tropes or to the Yoruba trickster figure. It is also evident in the more subtle—and typically Yoruba—process of mutual assimilation, through which syncretism occurs on the part of the subaltern culture without submission to the metropolitan one.

4.2 Ndoki

A key step in analyzing any text is to identify the narrator and its relation to the author. Since *ndoki* has been associated with the roles of artist and critic, it overlaps with the literary function of the autobiographical narrator. In the case of *Biografía*, this would appear at first glance to be Montejo, since he narrates the vast majority of the text from a first-person perspective. The only part of the text explicitly voiced by Barnet is the Afterword. However, the role of *ndoki* may be applicable to Barnet in regard to the entire text. Given Montejo's illiteracy, he depended on Barnet both to transcribe his statements in Spanish and to translate them into English. In this sense, Barnet functions to a certain extent as a critic—a role that has semiotic parallels with both *ndoki* and *nganga*. The form of the text is also a reflection of Barnet's role. Although Montejo voiced his own narrative, it was in response to a series of questions compiled by Barnet. Thus, its form was predetermined by Barnet prior to its narration by Montejo. Barnet's compilation of material and his arrangement of it into a text also parallels *ndoki*'s function of gathering ingredients and mixing them to bring about a transfer of knowledge that alters the perception of reality. From this, it appears that the creative application for Barnet—with the exception of his Afterword—is manifest largely in an editorial role. However, one may note that the respective functions of Montejo and Barnet in the process of textual production are enigmatic and, to an extent, indeterminate.

The ambiguity of Barnet's role as either artist or critic is significant because it raises the question of the type and degree of agency that he possesses, and ultimately touches on the same issue with regard to Montejo. It also underscores parallels between Barnet's task as a writer and the two Yoruba meta-concepts most commonly associated

with human agency—*ndoki* and *nganga*. This ambiguity is alluded to explicitly, both in Barnet's own Afterword to *Biografía*, and in his short article, "The Untouchable Cimarrón," written in response to an article "Cimarrón in the Archives" by writer-critic Michael Zeuske. Here, Barnet prioritizes Montejo's esthetic nature over the historical facts. He categorizes Montejo as a mythical persona who can only be explained from a poetic perspective. He contrasts his own poetic approach to the historically oriented approach employed by Zeuske, which aims to represent Montejo based on archival documents (Barnet, *Untouchable* 282). Barnet prioritizes the image of Montejo over the facts of his life. While he acknowledges the veracity of Zeuske's archival discoveries, he downplays their significance and their appeal to anyone except an academic audience (285). He also criticizes the timing of Zeuske's archival research, saying that, since it was carried out thirty years after his own book *Biografía de un cimarrón* "had become a classic and highly mystical theme" (282-83), it constituted a challenge to the literary-historical canon rather than a contribution to the canon's formation. While challenges to a canon can, and sometimes do, reshape it, Barnet discounts this threat by claiming that Zeuske's discoveries were not original and have no effect on the moral and esthetic nature of Montejo or the narrative that portrays him (283).

The implication that Barnet was already aware of the historical details which Zeuske brought to light, but chose not to include them in his own publication, raises several possibilities. Barnet may have considered them inconsequential and thus viewed their omission as having no effect on the authenticity or completeness of his own text. It also appears that he deliberately omitted them so as not to diminish Montejo's epic image. This second potential motive was likely a factor in Barnet's decision not to write a second

part about Montejo's later life. As Barnet points out in his article "The Untouchable Cimarrón," Zeuske's portrayal of Montejo, which is said to begin around 1904 or 1905, focuses on the period after his slavery. In Barnet's view, this stage, in which Montejo held seemingly menial occupations such as cane cutter and school porter lacked charisma and therefore did not merit a second part (Barnet, *Untouchable* 286). He believed that the luminosity of Montejo's life as a slave, *cimarrón*, and soldier in the Cuban army would be compromised if a second part were written (284). Not only does Barnet criticize Zeuske for his attempt to reveal information that might reconfigure the public perception Montejo, but he explicitly threatens anyone else who would do this by writing a sequel to his own book: "They can't touch Esteban Montejo. Yes, I'll grab a machete and chop off the head of whoever writes the second part of that book because it destroys the spirit and example that Esteban Montejo gave to the world. I'll kill him, I'm saying it as a warning. There can be no part two" (288). Barnet's behavior here matches White's description of metaphoric representation in that it expresses a desire to limit Montejo's depiction to the parameters of existing paradigms and hierarchies (White, *Metahistory* 36). While his portrayal of Montejo may have been novel at the time of its initial publication, it now constitutes the standard that Barnet adamantly defends.

The critic's role, which Piedra associates with *ndoki*, is more enigmatic in *Biografía*, since its textual manifestations are less numerous and less tangible than those of the artist's role. While the entire narrative is an example of Barnet's work as an artist, the only tangible references to his role as a critic are in the Afterword. They include his discussion of the testimonial novel and its relation to history and literature, his description of his own approach to creating discourse, and the roles of both literature and

of himself in the formation of (Latin American) culture (Barnet, *Biography* 203-08). Ironically, while his critical discussion of these topics is distinguished from the mimetic narrative that occupies most of the book, both by its diegetic commentary and by its heightened self awareness, it reinforces the role that Barnet perceived for himself as an artist, rather than as a traditional writer or historian. This role is alluded to numerous times in the Afterword; one of the most explicit examples is in the final paragraph, where Barnet makes the following claim: "We know the Art is impure and its nature is protean, so we should try to seek out its most trans-lucid depths. Art's greatest mission is that we find ourselves there. I want to be just one of the bellows in the sounding box of my people" (207). Here one may observe what amounts to a dual role for Barnet—that of both artist and critic—which reflects the double-voicedness of the text.

4.3 *Nkisi*

The second Yoruba meta-trope, *nkisi*, is defined as, among other things, a positive yet passive connection between the individual and tradition. It corresponds with the narrative provided by Montejo that functions as his own reflection of the two traditions to which he pertains: that of his cultural and biological forbearers, which can be attributed primarily to Africans; and that of the Atlantic slave trade, which was influenced significantly by the collaboration of Africans, Arabs, Europeans, and North Americans. The connection provided by Montejo is passive on an experiential level due to his role as a victim rather than an instigator of the slave trade. It is also passive on a mythopoetic level because his narrative is made in response to questions by a white ethnographer. Its positivity is inherent in its tangible nature which, at least on the surface, appears to be an

explicit, autobiographical account of different stages of his life. Its role as a fetish corresponds with its unique ethnographic and literary status as a slave narrative and largely first-hand account of a former slave living in the second half of the twentieth century. Its publication has been widely celebrated, based on its alleged status as a document which gives voice to those who had previously lacked it. Barnet himself alludes to this status in the final paragraph of *Biografía*'s Afterword when he describes his role as, "Memorialist, historian, story-teller, anything but a falsifier of the history of the people who couldn't tell their story, to whom I offer myself in caring and ready servitude" (Barnet, *Biography* 207-08). Barnet denies his role as a falsifier, but does not attempt to refute the alleged voicelessness of the African diaspora, whom he claims to assist. His ambiguity on this issue raises questions about his perspective and motives.

Since the Yoruba view *nkisi* on its most tangible level as the mixture of ingredients into a fetish or hex with magical properties, it is important to consider Barnet's publication—on both textual and metatextual levels—in this light. In some ways, *Biografía* may be viewed as a figurative *nkisi*. As a conglomeration of utterances by a now-dead former slave, it parallels the use of dirt containing decomposed bodies and exuviae of ancestors in traditional *nkisis*. Given the metaphoric and/or metonymic function of exuviae in realizing the goals of *nkisis*, it is likely that they have esthetic parallels in Barnet's work. Further, as a mediating text between a subaltern subject and a largely metropolitan readership, *Biografía* also parallels the relationship between the signifier and the signified, thus embodying Piedra's esthetic interpretation of *nkisi*.

The only explicit reference to *nkisi* in *Biografía* is in the description of the work of the Congo religion, where the word "nkise" [sic] is used to refer to the dead. While the

manner in which the dead are used to create hexes in this religion is not specified by Montejo, they are likely believed to function as absent yet powerful agents who are represented metonymically through the use of dirt (Barnet, *Biography* 34). Nonetheless, there are other implicit references. Montejo's mention of rooster feathers, rocks and apples as the first objects observed upon entry into an African household is likely an example of elements intended to be combined in *nkisi* for the defending against tumors, ill health, and evil doers (33). Other examples include descriptions of the preparation and execution of hexes. Montejo never mentions bodily exuviae in the context of hexes. However, he does mention the collection of dirt as part of a procedure to avenge a master for punishing a slave. Below is his description of preparations for the game of *mayombe*:

They did enkangues which were hexes made with dirt from the cemetery. With that dirt you made four corners in little mounds to resemble the points of the universe. They put star-shake, which was a herb, in the pot with corn straw to hold human beings. When the master punished a slave, all the others picked up a little dirt and put it in the pot. With that dirt, they were about to bring about what they wanted. And the master fell ill or some harm came to his family because while the dirt was in the pot, the master was a prisoner in there, and not even the devil could get him out (27-28).

There are several important points in this description that both adhere to and deviate from Yoruba traditions in Africa. The collection of dirt from the cemetery appears to be an attempt to utilize the power of the dead via metonymic representation. The positioning of dirt into four mounds in different corners to represent the four corners of the universe is in keeping with the Yoruba belief that, when making the world, the Godhead moved to the four corners of the universe. Incidentally, she is said to have created a cross—a belief which leads some Yoruba to syncretistically adopt the cross that Christians associate with a crucifix as a symbol of the universe's creation (Filan 73-74). The use of the star-shake herb or corn straw to imprison the offending master seems to have the same overarching

purpose as the collection of skin, hair, and nails—to reach a hex's intended recipient. However, the mode of representation associated with the star-shake herb or corn straw is more synecdochic than metonymic, since neither item has an obvious representational connection with a recipient's body. In such cases, intrinsic qualities of each item synecdochically represent the punishment of the recipient.

The use of hexes is also addressed in Montejo's description of the Congo religion:

When they had a problem with some person, they followed that person along any path and gathered up the dirt they walked on. They saved it and put it in the *nganga* or in a secret little corner. As the sun went down, the life of the person would leave him. And at sunset the person was quite dead. I say this because it happens that I seen it a lot during slave times (Barnet, *Biography* 34).

Like the previously cited description, this one also mentions dirt as an ingredient. It is different in that the dirt in this context had a direct connection with the intended recipient of the hex. Based on the locations from which it was collected, one may assume that it had undergone physical contact with the hex's intended victim. It may even have been thought to contain miniscule samples of his exuviae such as hair or dead skin cells, which could have fallen or rubbed off as he walked. In contrast to the dirt collected in cemeteries, which was thought to metonymically obtain the power of the dead, the dirt taken from people's footprints served to seize a portion of their body by which their spirit could be metonymically imprisoned. In the second instance, Montejo states that the dirt for the hex was placed in a big pot, called either a *cazuela* or a *nganga*. However, he makes no reference to other ingredients of the hex except that the work of the Congo religion involved the use of the dead and animals, specifically snakes. He provides no details about how the ingredients representing the dead and snakes were acquired or about how they were intended to influence the hex's recipient. Whether they functioned

as metonyms or metaphors is impossible to discern. An interesting and potentially overlooked detail of this description is the use of the word *nganga* to refer to the container. Since the Yoruba use this word to refer to an expert who acted upon a fetish to restore the natural order, it is surprising that Montejo uses it to refer to an inanimate object. However, this application of the word may reflect a belief among the Congo, whose religion was an outgrowth of the Yoruba one, that the container of a fetish could, like a fetish itself, be animated through the use of magic, and ultimately assume both volition and agency of its own.

4.4 *Nganga*

The citations provided in the discussion of the second meta-trope, *nkisi*, evidence not only its ambiguity, but its potential overlap with the third meta-trope, *nganga*. Since it may be argued that the four master tropes intersect with each other to a certain degree, it would be logical to expect a similar overlap among Afro-Caribbean tropes. However, this proposition is all the more enigmatic since, in their traditional—non-esthetic—sense, only two of four Afro-Caribbean tropes—*ndoki* and *nganga*—are portrayed as humans, or for that matter, as naturally-occurring, animate beings. While *nkisi* is said to possess the potential for animation, such a trait must be imbued to it by a human, and the *nkisi* itself must be constructed by human hands. *Simbi*, which the Yoruba identify as an omen or spirit, may possess the potential for animation as well, but not in the more obvious manner of *ndoki* or *nganga*, since it lacks a tangible body to inhabit. For these reasons, the Afro-Caribbean tropes—in their traditional senses—appear to lack the requisite congruency for overlap. Yet, even in Yoruba folklore, such an overlap is implicit, both in

the tropes' inextricable mutual connections in realizing their functions, and in the use of multiple trope names to refer to a single concept.

One example of the co-use of trope names may be seen in Montejo's application of the term *nganga* to the traditional function of *nkisi*. Montejo uses it to refer to a pot into which the ingredients for hexes are placed. He also uses its variant spelling "*enkangue*" to refer to the hexes themselves. In at least one instance, the use of *nganga* is ambiguous in that it could refer to either the container or its contents, a usage consistent with Cabrera's definition of the term (Barnet, *Biography* 27; Bettelheim 37; Palmié 861). In keeping with the synecdochic trait of a qualitative relationship between parts and a whole, the ambiguous use of *nganga* may reflect a belief that container, contents, and preparer are related through their common goal and are thus, at least in a figurative sense, co-ingredients in the spell being prepared. While Montejo does not use the term *nganga* to refer to the dead—he uses *nkise* [sic]—one might assume that the dead, spirits, and supernatural forces are included implicitly by the word *nganga* in the narrative, since they are all believed to play roles in the realization of the hex and are therefore synecdochically related through their shared essence and goal. This mentality could also be applied to the view held by some white editors that they were legitimate collaborators in the creation of slave narratives. It may also apply to Barnet. Montejo's use of each term—*nkise* [sic] as a person rather than as a fetish, and *nganga* as a container and/or its contents rather than as a person who manipulates it—in a context traditionally associated with the other term—may be the result of linguistic syncretism. However, it may be a reflection of the fact that every agent not only effects but is affected

by the tasks that he executes and the products that he creates. It is also reminiscent of the overlap between the two tropes metonymy and synecdoche.

Another observation made about *nganga* is that it represents the world in miniature (Bettelheim 37). This said, the narrative that, according to Barnet, represents the Cuban struggle for independence may actually function as a type of *nganga*. Like the *ngangas* alluded to within its narrative, *Biografía* may serve as a hex against the masters—who in the 1960s would have been the Cuban literary canon in which white influence was predominant. The narrative's genre—a testimonial which approximates a novel—functions as the hex's container, another type of *nganga*. The mixture within this figurative *nganga* would include the combination of discourses—first hand and second hand, mimetic and diegetic, historical and fictional. Further, the purpose of the *nganga*—to seek justice for slaves and their subaltern descendents against the metropolitan forces—is reminiscent of the use of *ngangas* among slaves. While metropolitan forces during both colonial and post-colonial times have exploited the African diaspora in numerous ways, the manner most relevant to this context would be the falsification of history. Thus, the symbolic function of Montejo's and Barnet's *nganga* is accompanied by the practical goal of correcting the historical record—an objective reiterated multiple times in Barnet's Afterword. Barnet is aware that threats of historical misrepresentation and appropriation are not limited to previously written texts, but may occur in any text either deliberately or inadvertently. It may be partly for this reason that he is so protective—even possessive—of Montejo's textual representation, and menacing to those who would attempt to represent the latter without consulting him first. In this sense, the obstacles which he claims that Montejo will create may serve as further examples of

literary-historical hexes against those who would tamper with what Barnet views as the most valid account of Montejo's life (Barnet, *Untouchable* 288). On a symbolic level, they may also serve as subtle reminders of the perseverance of Afro-Caribbean culture.

4.5 Trickster Figures and the Use of Literal and Figurative Language

Esu, the Signifying Monkey, and their corresponding myths are focal points for black theories regarding formal language use. According to Gates, writing is unique to the story of Esu, while speaking is unique to the myth of the Signifying Monkey. As a result, both tricksters create a tension that is evident in the double-voiced discourse of black texts and is related to the search for voice (Gates, *Signifying* 21). In terms of their respective modes of linguistic expression, the Signifying Monkey parallels Ifá and Montejo, whereas Esu parallels Barnet. However, the Signifying Monkey's status as a representative of rhetorical strategies prevents it from being easily compartmentalized (21). It may also correspond with Barnet's use of rhetorical strategies. Figuratively speaking, the presence of a character traditionally associated with speaking—the Signifying Monkey—in a non-spoken text parallels the monkey's loss of voice in Barnet's story, "The Owl and the Monkey." In Barnet's thinking, this may provide a figurative explanation for his deliberate use of deception and ambiguity in an Afterword that ostensibly serves to elucidate the narrative.

Both trickster myths and the vernacular tradition emphasize the use of figurative language. Myths of origins privilege the figurative and the ambiguous. Criticism tends to seek determinate, literal meanings that run counter to the basic tendencies of myth. Thus the literal and the figurative are engaged in a struggle of signification. A critical

text in a standard form of a language signifies upon myths and the figurative language which they contain. A vernacular, in contrast, signifies upon the tradition of letters (Gates, *Signifying* 22). While this distinction often holds true, it may be transcended if a critical text is expressed in figurative or vernacular language. The interplay between the literal and the figurative is found to a certain degree within the individual discourses of each person involved in the creation of this text—Montejo and Barnet. In Montejo's discourse, it may be seen through the insertion of rhetorical tropes in what otherwise appears to be a straightforward account of his experiences. Barnet's discourse in the Afterword is primarily critical in nature, given its function as a commentary on the preceding narrative and on Barnet's role as an author. Yet it still contains figurative language. Some of his rhetorical devices may facilitate the illustration of key points in a manner that would be difficult with literal language. However, figurative language contains an inherent ambiguity that has the effect of rendering the true meaning indeterminate. By signifying upon Montejo's narrative—first through transcription into written form, and second through interpretation, Barnet replicates Esu's role of signifying upon the discourse of Ifá. The ambiguity of his figurative language may be said to signify upon his own criticism. According to Gates, although Esu functions as a type of meta-discourse on the writing of Ifá's speech act, his interpretations of Ifa's riddles do not resolve the question of their meaning. Instead, they merely constitute second-order riddles (42). In some respects, this claim could also be valid for Barnet's Afterword, which while appearing to be a resolution, is really a perpetuation of the chain of ambiguity. Its subtitle "Afterword" may signal its meta-discursive status by giving it an air of finality and distinguishing it from the initial *logos* of Montejo upon which it

signifies. However, its most tangible achievement is to perpetuate the fundamental tension between the literal and the figurative, between *mimesis* and *diegesis*, and to heighten the very confusion which it appears to resolve.

In this sense, Barnet's use of figurative language in literary-critical contexts illustrates the inherent indeterminacy of interpretation, a phenomenon at least partly attributed to the use of vernacular. The conflict between speaking and writing, between literal and figurative language, between formal language and vernacular all contribute to the indeterminacy of a text which contains them. More specifically, they all contribute to the indeterminacy of texts about Esu, whom the critic Robert Pelton refers to as "all metaphor, all ambiguous oracle." They also demonstrate different aspects of Esu's self-reflexive function in Yoruba discourse (Gates, *Signifying* 22). While ambiguity is present to a certain degree in all four of the master tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony—it culminates in irony, given irony's tendency to say the opposite of what is means. Irony is also distinguished from the other tropes by its self-reflexivity, a trait shared by both Esu and the monkey figure Coco Macaco.

4.6 The Interplay of Different Levels of Discourse

Interestingly, the Yoruba tenet that the three stages of existence—the past, the present, and the unborn—exist simultaneously and may be reversed is alluded to by Barnet in his Afterword to *Biografia* and in his written response to criticism by Michael Zeuske. Describing the ideal type of testimonial novel in his Afterword, he says "It should represent the world in reverse. The function of the testimonial novel as rescuer of a foundational language, as a rescuer of the old historical novel, should be to give back

the original sound of storytelling to the contemporary novel" (Barnet, *Biography* 207). In his response to Zeuske, the ideas of chronological division and its reversibility are evident in Barnet's claim to have sought, found, recreated, and bestowed upon anthropological literature the person of Montejó (Barnet, *Untouchable* 287).

In slave narratives, the concept of reversal is manifest in a variety of forms. It exists in the resurrection of vernacular language used by former slaves that had all but disappeared by the time that *Biografía* was published in the 1960s. It may also be seen in the incorporation of African storytelling techniques found in Montejó's references to Santería practices and in the interpolated tales associated with the folkloric character Ma Lucía. Such storytelling techniques and the stories that they are used to convey contain residuals of African culture and, thus, on a symbolic level, may constitute ingredients used in a hex—alternately labeled *nkisi* by Piedra and *nganga* by Cabrera and Montejó. By bringing back archaic language styles and partially revealing traditions that were previously hidden from most readers, these stories and their techniques also constitute a form of *simbi* or reversal.

The words for the meta-tropes *nkisi* (*nkise* [sic]) and *nganga* (*enkangue* [sic]) refer both to cultural practices via literal denotations and to semiotic concepts where they are more connotative. They may also refer implicitly to the stages of psychological development of Montejó and other slaves. The references to Ma Lucía are relevant to these tropes for several reasons. First, they exemplify the practical application of *nkisi* and *nganga* in readers' lives. As stories within a story, the tales of Ma Lucía parallel the incorporation of ingredients in a hex (*nkisi* or *nganga* depending on the source). They also establish a new level of fiction, which enhances the narrative's meta-fictive and self-

reflective nature. The heightened textual awareness created by meta-fiction is essentially the knowledge of a relationship between different levels of the text and how such levels influence each other in terms of form and meaning. The inherent part-whole relationships in both extrinsic and intrinsic senses constitute metonymy and synecdoche respectively. However, by allowing the co-determination of meaning among its different levels—in effect, reversing the relationship between signifier and signified, or in terms of meta-tropes, realizing *simbi*—and facilitating a deeper consciousness of meaning among readers—a phenomenon associated with the irony, such tales may bring about a culmination of the cycle of tropes.

The tales of Ma Lucía are also important in that they invoke an important personage of Afro-Cuban folklore whose name may be a thinly guised allusion to the principal god of the Fon religion, the dual-gendered Mawu-Lisa who is the parent of the trickster god Legba. If this conclusion is valid, then the interpolated tales may constitute a form of multi-generational cultural continuity in terms of both the stories being transferred and the names of African characters who transfer them. Since Mawu-Lisa is considered to have two genders, the figure's representation by a single-gendered person—Ma Lucía—is ironic. Yet even in this syncretized Spanish derivative, which lacks the explicit cosmological gender references of the Yoruba original, one may still find interesting parallels in terms of gender-oriented symbolism. The Fon female component "Mawu," which is said to rule the night, is also phonetically similar to the word "Ma." In like manner, the Fon male component "Lisa," which is said to rule the day, parallels the belief among some Cuban slaves that the sun rules the day. The Spanish name used in its place, "Lucía" is a conjugation of the verb "lucir," meaning "to shine." Since it is

conjugated in the imperfect tense, which refers to an action beginning in the past, continuing into the present, and possibly continuing into the future, it may be interpreted as a reference to the perpetuation of Mawu-Lisa's wisdom across a multi-generational span. It could also represent the Yoruba principle of the interconnectivity of the past, present, and future. In a figurative sense, "Lucía" may be said to subsume the entire process of preparing hexes—from the gathering of dirt with dead people's remains to its comingling with the blood of both senior and junior *nganga* priests. This process parallels the language-based interaction of myth and personal history via the execution of the Ifá oracle (Matibag 152). Both Mawu-Lisa and the *nganga* priests are traditionally seen as agents who perpetuate oral or magical traditions, rather than as components of these traditions. Yet by integrating themselves into the traditions—either as storytellers whose names become associated with their stories, or as priests whose blood is mixed into a fetish—they effectively become components of the traditions that are passed down. Thus, they parallel the overlap between the tropes of *nkisi* and *nganga*.

Another example of reversal is the discursive interplay communicated on several levels by the Afterword. In the context of *Biografía*, this may be seen in the shift from the primarily mimetic narrative of Montejo to the primarily diegetic commentary of Barnet, a shift which raises questions about the legitimacy of each discourse and about the agency of each discourse's narrator. Beyond the context of *Biografía*, the theme of reversal is evident in Barnet's desire to reverse the trend of literary genres. As he puts it, "I no longer believe in genres, as the people have never believed in them." This statement decries the practice of artificial categorization in literature, which he likely sees as an inconvenient stricture on the process of his own writing. Since *Biografía* contains

elements of both ethnography and novelistic fiction, it cannot be accurately placed in either category. On a figurative level, this quandary parallels that of the Yoruba trickster figure Esu who is ostensibly, albeit deceptively, hobbled as a result of having one foot on earth and the other foot in heaven. However, Barnet's statement may also reflect his desire to facilitate the participation of others in composing, recording, and publishing testimonials. In the same paragraph he later adds, "I think our people still have much to tell in their own tongue, not in one invented for them to undermine them" (Barnet, *Biography* 206). This statement reiterates the importance of language and of maintaining the authentic language of the subject being represented in a text. It also hints at the power struggle carried out via the medium of language in which the metropolitan establishment subtly yet effectively silences members of subaltern groups by fabricating a language which will replace their own in the texts used to represent them. Barnet's statement suggests that he perceives himself primarily in the role of *ndoki*—a witch or an artist who creates a fetish—rather than in the role of *nganga*—a doctor or editor who adapts the fetish to suit an audience's preferences. Yet his adaptations of Montejo's language and his meta-critical commentary in the Afterword both favor his editorial role.

The topic of reversal is stated explicitly by Barnet in the Afterword and is hinted at in his response to the research of Michael Zeuske. One can also see several examples of the theme of reversal in the narrative itself. Yet it is interesting to note that sometimes the reversal is only superficial. An example may be seen in the changing status of blacks in Cuba as a result of slavery's abolition. While reversal occurs here, it is somewhat misleading, since the post-slavery working conditions for many blacks were little better than those prior to their emancipation. Montejo's cynicism regarding improvements for

blacks after abolition can be seen in his commentary on freedom: "What was called freedom because I realized that horrible things still went on. And there were masters, or rather owners, who believed that blacks were made for locking up and whipping. So they treated them the same as before. To my mind many blacks didn't realize things had changed because they kept on saying: 'Your blessing, Master'" (Barnet, *Biography* 62). Here Montejo satirizes the authenticity of slaves' emancipation based on evidence of their continued mistreatment. He also alludes to the continued mindset of racial inequality and its acceptance by both whites and blacks. Reversal in the narrative may also be seen in Montejo's observance of the diminishing prominence of once-famous war heroes and the function of this observance as a motivator for his compilation of a testimonial (199-200). In the Afterword, reversal is evident in the subversion of traditional bourgeois values that came as a result of the Cuban war of independence (204).

The majority of the narrative does not emphasize specific events in Montejo's life, but rather habitual events or general conditions. While the text does allude to a few specific events, it vacillates between references to these, descriptions of general conditions, and commentary about the conditions. Since only the first of these three components directly reflects the protagonist, there is less evidence on which to establish his psychological development and *bildungsroman*. In a similar vein, the text lacks the narrative flow normally expected of an autobiography. This lack of apparent formal arrangement may enhance the appearance of the text's authenticity by seeming to be a random assortment of memories from the stream-of-consciousness recollection of an illiterate former slave. Yet, there are probably other factors as well. This type of discourse reflects Barnet's combination of the mimetic narrative, typical of literature and

autobiography, with the diegetic commentary, typical of ethnography—a strategy whose importance he explicitly underscores in the Afterword. It is also in keeping with the lack of formal coherency typical of texts written in the contextualist mode of historical explanation, which corresponds with the trope of irony (White, *Metahistory* 13, 17).

Another important characteristic of the contextualist mode is the tendency to isolate elements of a historical field as subjects of study—be they broad or narrow—and then to pick out threads that link these elements to different areas of the historical context. Such threads are identified and traced outward in a bi-directional manner that seeks to determine both the origin of an element and its impact on future events and conditions (White, *Metahistory* 18). Ultimately, these threads are believed to either disappear within the context of another event or converge to cause a new event. The tendency here is not to integrate all events but to establish a chain of those considered to be of greatest importance. Contextualists view the progression of historical time as a wavelike motion in which certain phases or moments take priority over others. However, it is important to point out that the contextualist explanatory mode does not take a comprehensive view of history; instead it uses synchronic representations of segments of the process (19). This may explain Barnet's decision to divide the narrative into different sections, each of which represents what he considers to be a stage of historical importance. The most obvious example of this is the emphasis on the Cuban Revolution in the 1960s, which he refers to several times in the Afterword. He claims that the revolution served as a rejuvenating force for all testimonial works in Latin America by influencing the combination of historical and narrative genres (Barnet, *Biography* 203). He also claims that the Cuban Revolution undermined traditional bourgeois values by

providing members of this class, such as Barnet himself, the opportunity to speak both about the world, and about their role in the country's development (Barnet, *Biography* 204). In both instances, he highlights the importance of a single broad event, not merely as a link in a historical chain, but as a point where history directly augments the freedom of linguistic expression. Such a change has the potential to yield a cyclical aftermath, since it influences the manner in which historical events may be recorded. As Barnet himself states "I understand literary vocation in its communicative function to be intricately intertwined with the roots of concrete culture" (205). The practice of interweaving different topics, styles and levels of discourse may also have a symbolic function for Barnet. His claim to use the anthropomorphic Cuban fable suggests that his representation of a microcosm of Cuban culture parallels his representation of the ex-slave Montejo. Further, the interweaving of personal events with more general descriptions may be a subtle form of tying together the identities of Montejo and Cuba. In this sense, the soon-to-be-formed country of Cuba functions as a co-protagonist whose transition from childhood to adolescence roughly parallels the abolition of slavery, and whose *bildungsroman* is spurred by its war of independence from Spain and culminates with the Cuban Revolution of the 1960s.

4.7 Dialogue between Narrator and Amanuensis

The dialogue between interviewer and interviewee is not immediately evident in *Biografía*, since only one of the voices—Montejo's—is explicitly present. The narrative, as it exists in written form, is a conglomeration of Montejo's answers to Barnet's questions; yet the questions are not included in the text. This gives the false impression

that the narrative is a continuously flowing document whose content, topics, and form have been chosen by its narrator. It also eliminates the voice of the literate collaborator, thus rendering him a silenced Other, at least on a superficial level. With no explicit reference in the narrative to his own voice, Barnet—like the Signifying Monkey—depends on rhetorical strategies to express himself. These strategies include the arrangement of different sections of the narrative, inclusion and elision of details mentioned by Montejo, and emulation of Montejo's orality. When Barnet states in the Afterword his goal of representing the collective memory of his country, he admits "For that purpose I resort to oral discourse" (Barnet, *Biography* 205). While Barnet's voice is not detectable in the narrative, it is detectable in the Afterword. Here, it is added to the mixture of different rhetorical strategies. Not surprisingly, the autobiographical perspective of the slave is replaced in the Afterword by the perspective of Barnet. The Afterword may even be interpreted as a metaphor for Barnet's autobiography.

There are several factors which seem to support an interpretation of the Afterword as an autobiography in miniature. To begin with, it is voiced primarily from a first-person perspective. It adheres largely to a chronological trajectory including details from Barnet's past, present, and future, with respect to his development first as a recipient and then as a purveyor of cultural knowledge. When listening as a child to the stories told by his grandfather, Barnet claims to have been moved primarily by an awareness of the invaluable but unrecognized efforts of "those who had remained behind the invisible walls of history" (Barnet, *Biography* 202). This description is significant in several ways. First, it shows an awareness of the incompleteness and potential bias of the versions of history that have so far been written by people in power. At the same time, however, it

implicitly celebrates the cross-generational oral storytelling tradition integral to African and Yoruba cultures. In this sense, Barnet may be suggesting that even if the words and perspectives of Africans are silenced by white censors, certain key tenets of their tradition are still tacitly present. He prefaces the transition to the next stage of his development by stating that the alleged "people with no history" would wait for a time when they would be given due credit for their work and achievements. In his view, this change was facilitated by the Cuban Revolution because of its influence in uniting historical and literary elements into the single genre of the testimonial novel (Barnet, *Biography* 203-04). After signaling the transition to this stage, he provides a definition of the testimonial novel, and then describes his own early formation, ongoing strategy, and future ambition as a writer (205-06). From this point, rather than providing mimetic and chronological narrative, the remainder of the Afterword is primarily a diegetic commentary on his personal writing style, the theme of memory, and the role of the testimonial novel. However, instead of limiting himself to the third-person objective point of view typical of diegetic or critical discourse, he mixes it with that of the first-person, making it difficult to discern if he is expressing his own unique view or a more general one.

In the final paragraph, he offers his services as a mouthpiece for those unable to tell their story, and salutes other well known storytelling entities in the European, African, and Latin American traditions respectively, whose referential sequence parallels the transfer of agency from European slavers, to African slaves, to the product of these and indigenous civilizations in the Americas. His final image of Latin American culture as a "great mythological tree" (Barnet, *Biography* 208) is clearly metaphoric, yet also ironic, since it challenges the validity of the stories that he has offered to tell. Overtly,

the subjectivity of these stories is reflected in Barnet's use of the word "mythological." It is also implied on a more subtle level via the cultural significance of the Ceiba tree in Cuba. Given the Ceiba tree's adaptability to climates on different continents, and the diversity of shapes, heights, and textures that it adopts, it may serve as symbol for the Cuban nation (Niell 91-92). It has also been used by various Cuban leaders—most notably former President Gerardo Machado, who had it planted in the Park of Fraternity—as a multivalent symbol that could simultaneously cater to both Catholic and Santería mentalities (104). While the varied nature of the tree's appearance may parallel the racial diversity of Cuba, its ability to deceive viewers by its appearance into mistaking similarity for difference carries trickster-like connotations. Such connotations are echoed in the recognition and exploitation of its multivalent symbolic potential by Machado and other leaders. The final paragraphs of both Montejo's narrative and Barnet's Afterword underscore the importance of voicing the truth and make propositions to facilitate this goal. Yet they also implicitly acknowledge the limits of their ability to make this happen, either due to fading memory in the case of Montejo, or inherent poetic subjectivity in the case of Barnet.

Barnet wishes to bring to life, so to speak, the experiences of Montejo so that knowledge of them may be possessed by the broader reading public. He also wishes to perpetuate the spirit of the maroon, or more specifically that of Montejo, in both himself and in his writing. Although Barnet is a professional writer and expresses himself in the mode of writing, certain affects of orality are still present in the Afterword. This is all the more ironic, since the mimetic trait of orality is being integrated into a type of document traditionally viewed as diegetic, due to its function of providing commentary on the

preceding narrative. While the Afterword touches on many topics associated with high culture such as history, the testimonial novel, philosophy, literary theory, and the writing process, it does so in a seemingly haphazard manner devoid of formal structure. It vacillates between technical jargon and figurative language, between third and first person narrators, as well as between socio-anthropological topics and those of a more literary bent. Barnet claims that he seeks to bring these last two areas together, stating "If I move back and forth between these disciplines it's because I believe it's time they join hands without denying each other" (Barnet, *Biography* 205). While none of the language in the Afterword is colloquial, its inconsistency regarding type of vocabulary, narrative perspective, and topic lends it a conversational quality. This may serve to make the Afterword look like a testimonial in its own right, albeit one about Barnet rather than Montejo. Barnet never had to endure slavery or racial discrimination as did Montejo, yet he may consider himself a victim of stylistic and generic restrictions involving publication. Further, his use of orality may serve to undermine these restrictions and to illustrate his assumption of Montejo's identity—the spirit of the *cimarrón*, which he mentions both here and in his letter to Zeuske. The idea of undermining restrictions also relates to satire. As the mode of emplotment that corresponds with the trope of irony, satire is said to gain its power largely through the rejection of formal coherencies associated with the romantic, tragic, and comic modes of emplotment. Satire's etymological origin in the word *satura*, meaning “medley,” reflects its inherent traits of mixture and inconsistency and, thus, corresponds with the stylistic traits found in *Biografía* (White, *Metahistory* 28).

Further examples of mixture and inconsistency are evident in the titles of different editions of the book, as well as in the authors to whom they are attributed. These also bear interesting parallels with the concept of doubleness as reflected in the naming system of the Odu used in Ifá divination. Editions of the book titled *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Cimarrón: Historia de un esclavo*, both of which list Barnet as the author, essentially possesses names that are both bipartite and double. Their doubleness is evident in that both their titles and authors reflect a third-person, metonymic relationship between author and text. An edition titled *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* that identifies Montejo as the author is also bipartite and double, since its title and author reflect a first-person, predominantly metaphoric relationship between author and text. The publication data of other editions reflects the bipartite structure of secondary Odu names that lack a doubling component. One such example is the title *Biografía de un cimarrón* with Montejo listed as the author. In this case, the title reflects a third-person, metonymic relationship with the text, while the author's name reflects a first-person, metaphoric one. Here the explicit indication of authorship in Montejo's name provides different information than the implicit indication of authorship in the title. Rather than a mere contradiction, however, the reference to different contributors may be seen as an implication of co-authorship. Moreover, it parallels the co-authorship implicit in the names of the 240 secondary Odu, each of which consists of the names of an initiatory Odu and a responding Odu from the sixteen primary Odu.

An even more curious example of an edition whose publication data parallels non-double Odu names would be *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave by Miguel Barnet and Esteban Montejo*. This parallels the alternate names used for secondary Odu, such

as "Ogbe-w(o)-ehin," meaning "Ogbe look back," which is an alternate name for the Odu "Ogbe Iwori" (Morton-Williams, Bascom, and McClelland 411). "Iwori," the second referent of the original name, is replaced by a name that specifies the type of contiguity inherent in the original. If the most important components of a book's publication data may be expressed in bipartite form, they would consist of the title and the author's name. Since "Iwori" is listed second, it would correspond with the author's name. Yet, in the case of this last edition, where not one but two co-authors' names are given, authorship is expressed not as a metaphor but as a metonymy. While it makes no explicit reference to the specific roles played by each collaborator as narrator or editor, the listing of the two names begins with the initiator of contact—Barnet—and ends with the respondent—Montejo. In this sense, it may be said to parallel the hierarchy between an initiating Odu and a responding one, as well as the tradition of listing the initiator first. If the listing of both authors' names is considered equivalent to the phrase "w(o)-ehin" or "look back"—the second part of the bipartite alternate name, then it raises the question of who looks back to whom. Since the book's title constitutes the first half of the bipartite name, the use of the word "Autobiography" would suggest that it metaphorically represents Montejo. Therefore, the act of looking back would have to be carried out by Barnet. A responsive gesture by Barnet may seem ironic—and reminiscent of the prohibition against a responsive gesture by a higher-ranking Odu to a lower one. Yet it reflects the deeper truth that both men's utterances are responsive—Montejo's answers are responses to Barnet's initial questions; Barnet's transcription, translation, and editing are responses to Montejo's answers. As such, the discourse at each of these stages in the book's creation is influenced by its metonymic relationship with the words of the other person.

The comparison of the Odu naming system with the titles and authors listed for the various editions of Montejo's and Barnet's collaborative endeavour reflects the double nature both of the words *meji* and *aji* and of any texts or authors that function as likenesses of something else. For example, both a biography and an autobiography serve as simulacra of a person's life—in short, as doubles of that person. Since both genres' names suggest that their texts serve as written measures of people's lives, they imply a fairly high degree of accuracy. However, neither genre guarantees any degree of accuracy, nor does it indicate superiority over the other genre in terms of accuracy. The chief difference reflected in these genres' names is the perspective used in gathering information and in re-expressing it through narration. While neither perspective guarantees greater accuracy, each one necessitates a change in meaning from the other perspective, and from the facts as they actually existed. Since the exact replication of any facts via narration is impossible, the names of both genres effectively mask their limitations. They give the impression that their texts are replicas or doubles of the lives that they describe. Yet if they are truly doubles in any sense of the word, it is that they are countersigns of the original life being described. Effectively, they are differences cloaked in similarity.

A similar argument can be made for authors, transcribers, translators, editors who collaborate with the subject of an (auto)biographical undertaking. All of these figures play key roles in the shaping of the text, and sometimes are even listed as authors. While this type of identification may be accurate in the case of biography, it is less likely to be so in the case of autobiography, where the genre explicitly identifies the story's subject as its composer. Nonetheless, this phenomenon may be seen in the article title “The Politics

of Memory and Miguel Barnet's *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*" (Luis 475). The fact that Barnet is given any credit for the authorship of a so-called "autobiography" about Montejó indicates a fallacy in either the listing of the author or the title. Since Barnet did indeed play an authorial role in this book, the chief inaccuracy is in the title. As Barnet himself points out in his article responding to Michael Zeuske, most of the facts about Montejó's life after slavery were not interesting enough to merit inclusion in Barnet's book. Further, they would be counterproductive to his intended image of Montejó if included in a future book. Not only does Barnet unabashedly create a literary double of Montejó that differs from reality; he suggests that he is Montejó's double as well, albeit a double with a residual of similarity, concealed by myriad differences.

4.8 Transfers of Content and Form between Emissors and Recipients

There are multiple rhetorical parallels between the Yoruba orishas Ifá and Esu, the Babalawo priests; and the historical figures of Montejó and Barnet. First, the sixteen discrete Odus associated with the Yoruba religion and the Ifá oracle are not arranged by any divine truth or logic. Instead they are organized according to the rhetoric of the language used to inscribe them (Gates, *Signifying* 40). In traditional Yoruba practice, this is the language of the Babalawo. The Odus are divining tools, either in the form of a chain or palm nuts. The sixteen combinations in which all symbols are identical are considered to be the principal Odu from which the remaining 240 possible combinations are derived. Each Odu consists of multiple verses, which may be memorized and recited by a Babalawo. The verses chosen by the Babalawo in a session with a client depend in part on signs given by the tossing of palm nuts or an opele chain. The sides of the palm

nuts, or different links on the chain that face up after being tossed, form the basis for a Babalawo's advice to his client. However, the Odus are not viewed merely as discourse; they are considered to be intelligent beings who play an active role in the divining process (Buckley 193).

Rather than the mere goal of divination, the Ifá literary corpus constitutes an authentic portable archive of the Yoruba *epistème* (Matibag 160). Like the tropes *nkisi* and *simbi*, the Ifá system has a certain autonomy and self-reference. Yet it serves the purpose of providing meaning and form to experience. Its prophetic quality does not eliminate its literary aspect. This is due to the free play of signification built into the system in the form of interpretation, which is symbolized by Eshu. Thus in Ifá, literature is medicine, therapy, counsel, prophecy, and clarification of values. In short, it provides the tools and strategies necessary for living (166).

As in any form of divining or geomancy, the message reflected by each component is thought to be determined by non-human (or superhuman) forces. Therefore, the Babalawo serves as an interpreter of the message, rather than its author. Since the spoken language of the Babalawo serves as the bridge from oral speech—that of Ifá—to written transcription, it effectively imitates stylistic traits of the derivative written language into which it is recorded. Two key examples of these are the use of archaic words and references to other texts within the Odus (Gates, *Signifying* 40-41). While Montejo's text contains no explicit references to either Odu words or texts, it does refer to other archaic words and texts. Most of these words are drawn from the Yoruba tradition which reached him indirectly through its syncretism with Cuban culture. These include the meta-trope *nganga* (Barnet, *Biography* 27), its variant spelling *enkangue* (27),

the variant spelling *nkise* of the second meta-trope (Barnet, *Biography* 34), *mayombe* (27), the dance of *maní* (31), the red-checkered kerchief *vayajá* worn by those who perform *maní* (31), the little Congo man *chicherekú* (33), the Yoruba orishas *Eleggua* (35, 36), *Obatalá* (35), and *Changó* (208), and the *Mambises* troops (159, 162, 188).

The paucity of intertextual references within Montejo's narrative is due in large part to his illiteracy. Since he could not comprehend written texts, the only texts to which he refers—the interpolated tales associated with Ma Lucía—are of an oral nature. In contrast to Montejo's narrative, however, Barnet's Afterword contains references to a variety of texts, both written and oral. The written texts include travel books, chroniclers' tales (Barnet, *Biography* 203), testimonial literature (204), *The Kingdom of this World* by Alejo Carpentier (205), and metonymic references to the work of Aristotle (205) and Oscar Lewis (206). The oral texts include stories told by Barnet's father, legends and sayings of popular Afro-Cuban culture (203) ballads, poetry, theater and communal story-telling of popular culture (206). In the final paragraph, Barnet refers not to the oral texts themselves but to the entities who deliver them. These include the Brothers Grimm; witches from the Canary Islands; Changó, who in addition to being an important figure in Cuban Santería, is considered one of the most influential Yoruba orishas; Queztalcoatl and Tezcatlipolca, and the holy Santa Compañía of Galicia (208).

The transfer of information from Ifá to the Babalawo priests constitutes two simultaneous and related transformations: one from an allegedly divine source of wisdom to a human interlocutor; the other from oral delivery to written recording. Two similar simultaneous transformations may be observed in the discourses of Montejo and Barnet and in the relationship between them. Montejo's discourse, like that of Ifá, is spoken. It

is somewhat haphazard in its arrangement, lacking any overarching logic or truth to guide it. It maintains certain stylistic traits typically associated with illiterate speech such as colloquialisms, logical fallacies, and absence of any ostensible argumentative strategy. However, its lengthy discourse, while based on a dialogue, is presented as a monologue that lends itself to reading. For this reason, it may be said that two contradictory types of linguistic emulation occur in Montejo's narrative. First, Montejo's oral delivery emulates Barnet's written discourse in terms of length, inclusion of circumstantial details, and organization. These traits make Montejo's oral delivery easier to repeat and to transcribe, a fact in keeping with the typical discourse of Ifá. (Gates, *Signifying* 40). Montejo's oral style is also reminiscent of the emulation of writing found in a traditional Babalawo's speech. Two such characteristics are the use of archaic words and the allusions to other texts within the Odu (40-41). Montejo's speech contains an abundance of archaic words—derived mostly from Yoruba, but in some cases from Spanish—that are maintained, and sometimes defined, in Barnet's printed text. The most obvious allusions—those of a literary nature—are infrequent, given Montejo's lack of, and resistance to, literacy. The only explicit literary reference, aside from those made by Barnet in the Afterword, are Montejo's mention of the tales of Ma Lucía. However, one may consider his numerous references to traditions among slaves—most of which derive from Yoruba culture and are named with Yoruba vocabulary—as intertextual allusions as well. An important consequence of both Babalawo traits is that, although they enrich the language to a degree and enhance the appearance of its authenticity by highlighting unique cultural phenomena with which most readers are unfamiliar, they also impede its comprehension. While explanations of such phenomena are sometimes provided by

Barnet in *Biografía*, they are limited to superficial details. This is partly so as not to disrupt the text's narrative flow. Yet ironically, it may also serve to withhold information that would facilitate deeper comprehension. If true, the insertion of incomprehensible "texts"—including words, practices, and stories—by either Montejo or Barnet and their continued presence in the published version relates to Gates' opinion that Esu constitutes a differential network of meaning, whose discourse creates second-order riddles instead of solving first-order ones. It also relates to Gates' claim that the concept of closure is not an essential component of Ifá's speech (Gates, *Signifying* 41-42). The potential function of such Babalawo speech traits as impediments to comprehension parallels the creation of hexes to ward off intruders among both the Yoruba and their New-World descendants.

The second simultaneous transformation in these discourses is that Barnet's written transcription of Montejo's speech emulates the style of language stereotypically associated with Montejo. The overarching organizational structure of the discourse is based on the selection and arrangement of questions by Barnet, reminiscent of the organization of the discrete Odus that are interpreted by the Ifá oracle. The rhetoric used to inscribe the information from Montejo amounts to a mixture of ethnographic analysis and fictional tropes utilized by Barnet. In spite of Barnet's dominance in both structural and topical matters, Montejo may still maintain a substantial degree of agency in shaping the meaning of the text. This is due partly to his freedom to choose the degree of detail as an interlocutor. It is also due to the open-ended nature of his answers, a trait in keeping with the typical discourse of the Ifá oracle (Gates, *Signifying* 40). The recording of Montejo's speech in written form is enigmatic for several reasons. Even though his utterances were cued by Barnet's questions, they were delivered largely *ad libitum* as

creative acts in process. Conversely, their transfer to paper—and to a fixed form at all discursive levels—suggests a loss of freedom, if not for Montejo, then for his words. However, the emulation of oral traits in writing counters this trend by providing a residual of speech and a feeling of language free from the strictures of writing. One may even say that the reproduction of speech in written form constitutes a manifestation of the "Talking Book," a popular trope in African-American literature (Gates, *Signifying* 40). Of course, this raises the issue of which trait—spoken style, or written form—takes precedence. Montejo's speech may have been conclusively signified upon by the writing of a white metropolitan editor, in which case it would merely constitute one—and not the most powerful—ingredient in a *nkisi*. Or, like *simbi*, the oral residual may truly be able to transcend the limits of Barnet's writing in a manner that reverses the previously assumed relationship between his initial signifier and Barnet's signified.

4.9 The Noble Savage

Another important concept related to the tension between orality and writing is that of the Noble Savage. It maintains the status of a fetish, held in opposition to the Wild Man on the one hand and the civilized man on the other (White, *Tropics* 183). As a metaphor, it serves to account for phenomena that are out of keeping with normal expectations (184). Yet for several reasons, it may also be deemed a form of metonymy. As both a fetish and a relationship between the signifier and signified, it corresponds with the meta-trope *nkisi*, which corresponds with metonymy. Montejo's self portrayal is metonymic in that it utilizes a few selected segments of his life to represent his composite experience both during and after slavery. Further, his life is used to represent experiences

of the broader slave population. Perceiving the noble savage as a *nkisi* or metonym is important in that it reflects the incompleteness of the noble savage's projected image: a positive, if oxymoronic, denotation for the subaltern accompanied by a negative, ironic, connotation for the metropolitan.

Montejo's depiction as a Noble Savage also provides evidence of irony's predominance as a meta-trope used by both Montejo and Barnet. Contextualism, the explanatory mode that corresponds with irony, also relates to the theme of the noble savage and the manner in which its treatment in *Biografía de un cimarrón* differs from that in the other two narratives. A common strategy of editors such as Barnet who lived after slavery was to undermine the stereotype of the submissive slave. To do this, Barnet shifted his focus from the sufferings experienced by slaves—more typical of nineteenth-century abolitionist texts—to the non-conformity, racial dignity, and rebelliousness of the runaway (Sklodowska 143). The emphasis on an individual who differs from the broader subculture of slavery, rather than on the subculture itself, may seem out of keeping with the contextualist tendency to portray stages of the historical context in a synchronic manner. However, the revolutionary character traits attributed to Montejo were very much in keeping with the subversive tendencies of the Cuban Revolution in the 1960s, which Barnet alludes to and celebrates in his Afterword (Barnet, *Biography* 203-04). Montejo's non-conformity is evident in numerous instances throughout his narrative. These include his short-lived escape from the Flor de Sagua plantation (20), his unwillingness to settle for easier conditions by working in the masters' house (22), his tolerance of different sexual orientations (40-41), his longer venture into the mountains where he lived as a *cimarrón*, his unwillingness to interact with white Cubans even after

the abolition of slavery (Barnet, *Biography* 62) or with Americans after the war of independence (194), his preference for living alone (199), and his symbolic rejection of modern weapons in favor of the machete that the black Mambises troops allegedly used to defeat the Spanish soldiers (162-63, 200). From a literary-critical standpoint, however, the most significant manifestation of his non-conformity may be his defense of orality and his rejection of literacy.

4.10 Orality vs. Literacy

Montejo's defense of orality includes references to African folk tales, Caribbean folk traditions, histories of his family and of slavery, as well as an implication that his memory is a more reliable source than writing for the purpose of keeping records. Other examples include his credence in the story told about his family history by his God-parents (Barnet, *Biography* 19), and his prefacing or concluding of various experiences with phrases that emphasize his firsthand knowledge and the reliability of his memory (Barnet, *Biography* 20, 39, 43 200; Sklodowska 145). To a certain degree, the allusion to stories by his God-parents demonstrates both a combination and an interchangeability of what it read—or heard—and what is lived in Montejo's attempt to integrate strands of information from different sources into a collective memory (Molloy, *Face* 58, 161). Furthermore, it accepts such claims with little or no evidence, based on a willing suspension of disbelief and the creation of a poetic faith, not unlike that used in fiction (66). In spite of Montejo's defense of orality, he sometimes questions its veracity. This is evident in his doubt regarding some stories by other slaves, such as the claim that blacks committed suicide (Barnet, *Biography* 42).

Critiques of literacy, which are fewer than defenses of orality, serve to undermine the privileging of written language typical of European and North American cultures. In this sense, they are in keeping with the subtle but significant critique of white hegemony implicit in the concept of the noble savage. Problems associated with writing may be inadvertent, as in the misspelling of Montejo's middle name: "My real middle name is Mesa. What happened was that they wrote it down wrong in the records, and I left it that way" (Barnet, *Biography* 18). On the other hand, problems may be deliberate—as in the case of tavern keepers who record inflated prices to cheat slave customers (28). The second example also suggests that literacy as an instrument of power in a highly stratified society can lead to the corruption of a written text and of the person who possesses or creates it. This observation parallels accusations made against Barnet for distorting Montejo's oral account by editing it, providing commentary on it, translating it, and transcribing it from oral to written form.

The greater emphasis on spoken language illustrates Montejo's belief that it can be used to transfer information with an efficacy equal to or greater than that of writing. Thus, it serves to refute the erroneous categorization made by some critics of slaves as a "people without history" (Skłodowska 140). Blacks indeed possessed their own forms of historical expression. These included articles in newspapers and literary publications in the Caribbean, sometimes without the intervention of whites. Yet they also included oral forms of cross-generational transfer either from parents to offspring, or via the communal story-telling of the griot—a practice which Montejo may seek to emulate with his own account. As an ethnographer, Barnet was undoubtedly aware that blacks used various means of historical expression, yet he also knew that they faced greater impediments than

other groups. It may be for this reason that he alludes to the idea of their voicelessness twice in his Afterword, referring to them as "the so-called 'people with no history'" (Barnet, *Biography* 203) and "the people who couldn't tell their story" (208).

The theme of voicelessness is applied primarily to blacks in the context of this narrative, in the section titled "The War of Independence;" yet it may be expanded to include Cubans in general. Here Montejo criticizes Cubans' submission to Americans, both in terms of tolerance of the latter's boorish behavior in Cuba, and in terms of the complicity of some Cubans to cover up the true reason for America's intervention in the war. As Montejo puts it, "Even the littlest kid knew the Americans blew the Maine up themselves to get into the war," thus claiming that the Americans deceitfully inflicted harm upon themselves for the purpose of justifying the occupation and exploitation of Cuba. He later adds, "If the people had gotten riled up, then everything would have been different. A lot of things wouldn't have happened. But when the hour of truth came, no one said one word or did a single thing. Máximo Gómez, who I thought knew something, clammed up and died with the secret" (Barnet, *Biography* 195).

On the surface, Montejo aims to undermine several myths. These include America's victimization via the loss of its battleship the USS Maine, its justified intervention in Cuban war for independence in 1898 on the basis of the battleship's destruction, and General Máximo Gómez' status as a war hero. On a deeper level, Montejo also demonstrates that oral versions of history—including false ones—have the potential to reshape people's perceptions of the past. As for Cuba's voicelessness on this issue, it is represented metonymically by Gómez' refusal—due to his high profile status as a representative of the military—to tell the truth about the battleship's destruction, and

metaphorically by the silence of everyone else. Neither Montejo nor Barnet explains the reasons for Cubans' reticence to speak up about this issue at the time. However, their collective silence was likely accompanied by a deep resentment towards America, which is represented in Montejo's dislike of Americans. Since Montejo's resistance towards his overseers served as a metaphor for the feelings of Cuba towards the United States at the time, the significance of the concept of the noble savage may exist on both individual and collective levels (Childs 296).

A significant, but perhaps unintended, irony of this narrative is that Barnet's strategies to dignify his subject's orality have the effect of at least partially undermining it. His overarching goal is to undermine the white hegemonic version of history, a fact made evident by a comment in the Afterword, titled "The Alchemy of Memory": "Testimonial literature will revise a mangled, deformed interpretation of the past to offer a vision from the perspective of the class struggle" (Barnet, *Biography* 204; Colás 39). Barnet influenced this alchemy by creating and organizing a series of questions that served as the basis for Montejo's narration (Barnet, *Biography* 9-12). He then selected passages from his taped interviews that highlighted topics central to his message, among them Montejo's views on the supremacy of orality. He also adapted the style of language in his reconstructed translation to preserve the oral tone of Montejo's testimony (140). In spite of his seemingly altruistic intention to give Montejo a voice, he represents him through writing—a medium in which Montejo lacks proficiency. Further, he controls the structure—through his division of the narrative into sections, the style—through his revision of the Montejo's colloquial dialect, and the content—through his compilation of questions and his editing of answers. Barnet's methods of questioning and selecting

material, as well as his attempt to create an oral history through the mimesis of a black narrator have been criticized by scholars (Zeuske 266).

Another potential source of criticism is the uncertainty involving Barnet's motives. Barnet may have aimed to satirize the dominant white culture, in keeping with the traditional aims of discourse on the noble savage. At times, however, he appears to perpetuate the very culture that both he and his Montejo claim to undermine. His metaphoric image of slavery, while innovative in its use of a living subject and instrumental in dispersing some little known details of the historical context, is also a politically expedient text that transforms an oral message from a former slave into a written document by a white editor (Childs 296). Thus, at least on a discursive level, it subtly perpetuates the existing hegemony between blacks and whites in Cuba. The figure of the noble savage is already ironic, given its typical aim of criticizing those in power, in spite of its explicit focus on marginalized peoples. White claims that the noble savage represents the ironic stage in the Wild Man motif, since it refers not to savages but to humanity in general (White, *Tropics* 191).

However, Barnet's text may be doubly ironic, since it appropriates the text—and the voice—from the person who would appear to desire it the most, and transfers it to a member of the white power structure. If this is true, then it would exploit the metaphoric innocence—not only of former slaves, but also of readers, regardless of their race, who assumed Barnet's motives to be altruistic. In other words, Barnet may have given his readers an incomplete version of his system of signification. He may keep the deeper aims of his system secret by exploiting easy correspondences with goals of both the dominant white Cuban system and the nascent Afro-Cuban one. Like the Yoruba and

their diaspora in the New World, Barnet may submit certain signifiers to other semiotic systems in use while maintaining the freedom of his signifieds. The ambiguity of his text and the indeterminacy that it suggests about his motives are in keeping with the meta-trope *simbi*, the literary figure of Coco Macaco, and the trickster. Barnet may have had no intention of reinforcing the power structure via the literary-ethnographic objectification of marginalized races. Yet, at least in a figurative sense, this is what his text accomplishes. In a manner reminiscent of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas' "Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias," Barnet's text prioritizes "the mold" of writing over the truthfulness of content and the self-expression of the subject (Camacho, *Meta-historia* 38). In a broader sense, the same may be said of all noble-savage texts written by people other than their protagonists.

4.11 Rememoration

The binary oppositions of speaking and writing, as well as of narrator and editor, are related to the topic of rememoration, an integral component of testimonial narrative. In *Biografía de un cimarrón*, there are three basic types of rememoration: Montejo's rememoration of stories from other people, his rememoration of his own experiences, and Barnet's rememoration of Montejo's stories. The first type underscores the varying sources of Montejo's information and suggests his belief in an organic continuity between the story-teller and the audience. While he is skeptical about the authenticity of some stories, such as those claiming that blacks committed suicide, in most cases, he appears to maintain a willing suspension of disbelief. His credence in the validity of memory may be due to naiveté on his part, or it may be a gesture of racial solidarity, since most, if not

all, of the story-tellers in question were blacks like himself. While Montejo occasionally provides information that was shared with him by his ancestors or fellow slaves, this is limited to information about his family, certain phenomena of slave society that he did not observe first-hand, and interpolated tales from the legendary Ma Lucía. The great majority of his narrative involves rememoration of the self.

Self-rememoration involves drawing up memories of past events but expressing and interpreting them from the perspective of the present. These memories, expressed anew decades after the events that they depict, are influenced and ultimately subjectified by several different factors. As one's recollection of an event or condition becomes less familiar, it is increasingly represented by an image created in the mind rather than by knowledge of the event. Not only does this diminish the alleged authenticity of eye-witness accounts; it also bears similarity to the retelling of events by a third party, who base their reports on the eye-witness testimony of others. The eye-witness testimony is synecdochically perceived to do what the initial recollection of the event actually does—establish a direct connection between a fact and its representation. Yet as time progresses, the existing memory—even of an eyewitness—is repeatedly refashioned in a manner similar to the retelling of a story by different amanuenses, translators, or editors. While the linguistic representation may function as a synecdoche that expresses the essence of the event, its factual accuracy is inevitably compromised. Further, when a text is narrated orally, the witness' memory is subjectified (Ochando 41).

While Montejo never comments on the veracity of memory *per se*, he does make several indirect references to it. After describing what he claims to be the cause of the enslavement of Africans by whites near the beginning of the first section of the narrative,

Montejo makes the definitive claim: "For me, none of that is forgotten. I lived through it all" (Barnet, *Biography* 19). This claim is surprising because the description to which it refers is voiced from a third-person perspective. Since he never makes any reference throughout the entire narrative to his own experience either on a slave ship or in Africa, it is highly probable that the description of blacks being lured onto boats by the red kerchiefs of white men is a story that he was told rather than an event that he witnessed. He dedicates the rest of this paragraph to a summary of the origin of his names, one of which, "Mesa," he attributes to his mother's master. Although he bases his explanation on the account of his godparents rather than on his own observation, he defends its veracity, saying "I've never forgotten anything they ever told me" (20). In both quotations, Montejo underscores the value of his own memory as an authenticating device, yet in the second one, he acknowledges that his memory, regardless of its strength, is based on a verbal retelling by someone else. In effect, he identifies memory as merely one of several entities in a chain of signifiers. Thus in this context, he parallels the role of the Babalawo as identified by Gates, which is neither the origin nor the termination of a message, but a medium through which information may be transferred (Gates, *Signifying* 40). While his description of events in Africa makes no mention of a verbal retelling, the subsequent reference to such a retelling may lead one to suspect that the stories about the origin of slavery in Africa have been retold as well. If true, this would refute Montejo's claim to have lived through it all. This implicitly diminishes the importance of memory—even a very good memory—by rendering it dependent on earlier memories. In a sense, it also provides a useful metaphor for the unidirectional dependency of different stages of a person's memory. Montejo's statement in the last

paragraph of the narrative, "If I could, I would tell the whole story now" (Barnet, *Biography* 200), may be an acknowledgement of (his) memory's limitations.

Although Montejo touts the strength of his memory at the beginning of his narrative, he does the opposite towards the end. After describing and criticizing several false claims circulating among white Cubans regarding the intervention of the American forces, Montejo insinuates the detrimental effect of propaganda on the veracity of his own memories, a force which, in spite of his awareness of it, he is unable to stop. He says, "Back then, I knew more things, more of the dirty tricks which history has covered up. I discussed them only with my friends. Now things have gotten all mixed up in my head. In spite of that, I can remember the most important things" (Barnet, *Biography* 196). These statements amount to a meta-critical commentary that acknowledges history's potential to falsify the truth. While he suggests that such a falsification may be deliberate, he also acknowledges that the clarity and accuracy of ideas may diminish over time, resulting partly from exposure to competing interpretations.

A key trope associated with remembrance is prosopopeia, in which speech is attributed to an imaginary or absent person (de Man 926). It is present even in self-remembrance, but is more obvious when one person's memories are retold by another. According to de Man, the name on the title page provides legal but not epistemological authority, and is not the proper name of the subject capable of self-knowledge and understanding. He states, "The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge—it does not—but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions" (922). This view has

noteworthy parallels with Afro-Caribbean. The lack of closure of a textual system is a key idea represented by the Yoruba trickster. Yet, while indeterminacy is largely attributed to him, it is also due to factors in the communicative process. Though Afro-Caribbean tropes often refer to non-linguistic entities, they have important linguistic parallels. In linguistic and non-linguistic contexts, they are associated with processes of substitution where an object or word is used to represent something else. In the creation of fetishes or hexes (*nkisi*), the roles of some tropes overlap, thus making their boundaries indeterminate. Likewise, in a linguistic context, the true roles of those referred to as artists (*ndoki*) or editors (*nganga*) are ill-defined, a fact that causes their respective degrees of agency to be uncertain.

4.12 The Role of *Nkisi* in Rememoration

While Piedra defines *nkisi* as a relationship rather than a person, and thus suggests that it may not possess agency, the Yoruba tradition allows that it may. It is through the mixture of dirt, which represents the deceased, with other elements that the deceased are granted agency through their ability to influence the fetish's target. Like prosopopeia, *nkisi* allows the dead to speak, but only within the circumstances of the fetish. *Nkisi*, while believed to possess its own free will, still depends on the intervention of a living human who must place it in a container to activate it. Likewise, Montejo, his god-parents, and fellow slaves were all in possession of free will—and of agency—to varying degrees; yet in order for their agency to be extended to the present, their voices must be figuratively placed in the container of a written text. As a result of this interchange, however, their agency—and possibly their message—is compromised by the author who

represents them. Such a transfer of voices occurs at the third level of remembrance, which, in the context of *Biografía*, is realized by Barnet. It is the culmination of a multi-staged editorial process that occurs in most slave narratives. By subsuming two types of remembrance carried out by Montejo, it shows how an editor may appropriate agency from an author or narrator. One of *Biografía*'s greatest ironies is its appeal to the desire for authenticity. Despite the fact that it consists almost entirely of eyewitness testimony, its veracity has been diminished due to the subjective memory of Montejo as well as the compositional and editorial strategies of Montejo and Barnet, in keeping with the Yoruba storytelling tradition and the goals of each person directly involved in the text's creation.

4.13 Perceptions of Testimonial Literature and *Biografía*'s Placement within It

Biografía is usually categorized as an example of testimonial literature, a genre that grew in popularity during the mid-twentieth century. Testimonial literature focuses on experiences, feelings, and perspectives of people whose voices have traditionally been left unheard. It describes the lives of those who lacked means or freedom of expression due to illiteracy, cultural alienation, and/or racial discrimination. Its main goals include presenting these people's history from their own perspective and either supplementing or supplanting their official history, which is generally accepted by society at large. In effect, it advances subaltern attitudes and perspectives towards metropolitan institutions, thus turning private stories onto the public sphere (Saldívar 393).

In spite of testimonial literature's appeal to people who previously lacked a means of self-expression in the broader public sphere, it is often viewed with skepticism. One reason is that, due to its mixture of historical and creative techniques, it does not fit

conveniently into the category of literature or history. Some historically inclined writers feel that the *testimonio* is “outside or at the margin of historically constituted institution of literature in modern Western culture” since it is “not literary, not linguistically elaborated, or authorial.” This is reflected in the ambivalence regarding its documentary nature as opposed to its artistic aspect. It is also evident in the uncertainty of the distinction between the *testimonio* and the testimonial novel, the latter of which is considered more literary due to its greater degree of elaboration (Beverly 6). Furthermore, the *testimonio* is not motivated by the same humanist ideology as literature, and at times it resists being literature. One testimonial author, Ana Guadalupe Martínez claims that her own work is “the result of a collective and militant effort and has no intellectual or literary pretensions; it is a contribution to the ideological development and formation of cadres on the basis of concrete experience” (7). She feels that her account will become compromised or betrayed by becoming literature (8). Her co-prologuist René Cruz echoes her sentiment by stating that intellectual intermediaries deform the essence of first-hand accounts by adapting them to the perceived needs of their audiences (7). In spite of some people’s view that the *testimonio* should be strictly historical, it is of great interest to Inter-American literary studies because of the manner in which it incorporates real historical time and space (Saldívar 393).

4.14 The Role of a Testimonial

A testimonial may represent an individual or a community. When representing an individual, as some claim to be the case with Montejo's narrative, it is considered a literary work. However, if it represents a group, then it is seen more as an instrument of

fighting on the part of indigenous communities (Ochando 170). The testimonial genre grew in Latin America at the end of the 1960s, along with the growth of the "new Spanish-American novel." Institutionalized primarily in Cuba, it integrates both literary and non-literary elements and is associated with three different genres: biography, autobiography, and the documental novel (29, 181). In order to meet the ideological and esthetic requirements of leftist modernist literature, Barnet prioritized the artistic crafting of his account over its factual accuracy (Beverly 8). He had a combined interest in ethnology and literature and made a conscious effort to interweave the two genres. He acknowledged this in an interview for the Caribbean Review in 1980 when he said "One has to go towards a fusion of the disciplines towards integration" (Barnet, *Literature*). One obvious indicator of the mixed nature of his narrative is found in the title of the Afterword, "The Alchemy of Memory" (Barnet, *Biography* 203), which alludes to the medieval pseudoscience of creating gold through a mixture of base materials. Barnet's reference to this practice suggests the inevitability of poetic material—and, thus, of subjectivity—in memory-based discourse.

The authorship of most testimonials differs from that of written texts. This is due to their expressive circumstantiality, or inclusion of profuse incidental details of seemingly low importance, which impedes their continuity ("Circumstantial," def. 2). The works of Barnet and Elena Poniatowska have previously been identified as exceptions to this rule (Ochando 184). However, Barnet's *Biografía* may largely adhere to it. The circuitous and tangential nature of its discourse, which sometimes juxtaposes narrative with commentary, seems more in keeping with the oral style of delivery than with a document composed in written form. Granted, the overall text is divided into

sections whose topical arrangement based on questions from an interviewer is reminiscent of another well known text on slavery, *Los negros esclavos* by Fernando Ortiz, a fact of which Barnet was probably aware when structuring his text, since he was a protégé of Ortiz (Ochando 109). Nonetheless, some of the topics discussed by Montejo, such as entertainment among slaves or his own sexual relations, seem incidental to the main emphasis on suffering that is typical of a testimonial account.

Cuban literature plays an important role in the revolutionary movements of contemporary Latin America (González *Biografía* 249). The goal of turning a person's account into literature without falsifying it takes on special significance in this context because of the radical nature of the Cuban historical and social contexts. Fidel Castro talks about the conversion of liberal intellectuals to the ideology and practice of a Marxist-Leninist revolution. This involved people from the petty bourgeoisie taking up revolutionary positions more closely associated with peasants (250). As a result, it required them to assume new perspectives, and in a sense, new identities. Such changes are similar to those undergone by Montejo during his foray into the forest. After his return to society, he is able to see things from a detached perspective, not unlike that of a social anthropologist. Although he is an active agent in Cuban history, his distanced authorship parallels that of Barnet (Feal 108; González, *Biografía* 261). Just as Montejo acquires an outside perspective through his physical absence from slavery and his textual revisions, Barnet acquires an inside perspective by assuming, to a certain degree, the identity of Montejo via the retelling of his story. By narrating the stages of Montejo's life in a way that parallels the different stages of history in the Afro-Cuban psychology, the novel serves to revise and articulate collective memory (González, *Biografía* 260).

Such revisions of history and identity are reminiscent of the compromise and dialogue involved in the conquest of the Americas by the Spanish. They symbolize the mutual process of change and exchange that some people expect between metropolitan and subaltern entities (González, *Biografía* 263). While Barnet likely does not want to adhere to the mentality of inequality suggested by the terms metropolitan and subaltern, he may well be promoting the principles of compromise, dialogue, and empathy as ideals for different groups in Cuba to adopt in their relations with each other.

4.15 Barnet's Adaptation of Montejo's *Nkisi*

Barnet's manipulation of Montejo's account occurs in a myriad of ways. Perhaps the most obvious example can be found in the title, which is inaccurate from several standpoints (Feal 100). In the Spanish editions, *Cimarrón: historia de un esclavo* and *Biografía de un cimarrón*, Barnet is listed as the author. However, in the English translation, *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*, Montejo is generally portrayed as the author and Barnet as the editor. Further, only a small part of the book deals with slavery and Montejo's experience as a runaway (101). Another important form of Barnet's manipulation is the structuring of the narrative. This structure is important because of the information on which it focuses, the order in which it presents the information, and its effect on the reader. The narrative has three major divisions—"Slavery" (Barnet, *Biography* 21), "The Abolition of Slavery" (63), and "The War of Independence" (161)—each of which focuses on a symbolic stage of Cuba's history. In addition, each section contains internal divisions of varying length, some of which possess titles of their own. Examples include subsections in the section on "Slavery" titled "First Memories"

(Barnet, *Biography* 17), “Life in the Barracoons” (23), and “Life in the Sugarmills” (45). These subtitles show how different parts of the narrative are centered on specific topics in Montejo's life and arranged in chronological order. While much of their material may be drawn from Montejo's firsthand account, it is unlikely that he narrated them in this order without the incentive of specific questions from Barnet. The structure also gives the work a novelistic quality by evoking a *bildungsroman* (Foster 51).

In Barnet's own introduction, he claims that he is attempting to fill the gap of documents written from the perspective of slaves (Ogundayo 190). While David William Foster acknowledges that Barnet sought to publicize the conditions of slavery and document the authentic folk culture of Cuba in keeping with a goal of the Cuban Revolution, he adds that Barnet also attempted to reintegrate himself into the Cuban literary establishment (191). Elzbieta Sklodowska points out that, in a certain way, Barnet had the final say regarding the form in which the narrative would be published through his own selection, arrangement, revision, and retelling of Montejo's material. This raises the issue of Barnet's ability to impose his will over that of Montejo—an ability which is acted upon, to a certain degree (192). Thus it is possible that Barnet utilizes his powers as interrogator and editor to realize the goal suggested by Foster. However, the essential material that he must work with is that which Montejo has chosen to give him. The secondary research which he conducts to inform himself about Montejo's background may enhance, but not replace, the principal text. Thus by choosing the information, degree of detail, and potential embellishments of the truth in his answers to Barnet's questions, Montejo is a co-participant in his own mythopoesis. William Luis claims that Montejo was aware both of his own uniqueness as the sole

surviving runaway slave in Cuba and of Barnet's interest in exploiting him for his own fame as a writer. If so, Montejo likely attempted to maximize the opportunity to shape documented version of his life in a manner that he felt would be of interest to a Cuban audience (Ogundayo 193). It has been suggested that, by surviving slavery, Montejo becomes the hero of the Yoruba Ifá epic, whose name, Afuwape, means "he who endures by virtue of character" (198). Also, the Yoruba rite of passage, which includes separation, initiation, and return, essentially parallels the three basic transitions of Montejo's development: his separation—first forcibly from his parents and later voluntarily from the barracoon, the solidification of his rebel character through his experiences as a *cimarrón* and revolutionary soldier, and his return to civilization after the abolition of slavery in Cuba. It is possible that Montejo crafted his answers with this allegorical goal in mind, or that Barnet sought to achieve it through his selection of questions and his revision. Montejo is important, not only as a former slave who offers eyewitness testimony, but also as a repository of memory and a mouthpiece for his ancestors who can no longer speak. Their stories are passed to him, and he in turn passes them to Barnet, albeit with a degree of preliminary editing (200). From this, it appears that the practice of placing stories in a repository for transmission to later generations is a practice shared by the Yoruba, their enslaved diaspora, Montejo, and Barnet. This function is in keeping with the belief held throughout much of west and central Africa that the living, dead, and unborn form an organic text that serves as the foundation for civilization (Twitty 176).

In the final sentence of his Afterword, Barnet may subtly allude to this belief when he uses the metaphor of the "great mythological tree" to represent Latin American

culture and its continuing influence on the world (Barnet, *Biography* 208). It may also be said that both Montejo and Barnet parallel the Babalawo who interpret the Ifá texts in their role as repositories of wisdom that must be sought out by future generations. Another figure referred to by the Yoruba is the Baba Elegun, whose task was to memorize the town's traditions to recite them at the coronations of rulers, festivals, marriages, and other events (Twitty 179). While the responsibilities attributed to this figure appear very similar to those of both the Yoruba Babalawo and the griot of Senegambia and Western Sudan, his name may reflect the somewhat different manner in which his role is perceived. The first word, "Baba," is somewhat ambiguous, since it bears similarity to the word "Babalawo" and is a colloquial Arabic word for "father." "Elegun" is similar to the name "Eleggua"—a variation of the second word in "Eshu Elegbara" and the only name of the Yoruba trickster to appear in Montejo's narrative. While the combination of two names that refer to a messenger and potentially originate from the same culture may seem unremarkable, the association of Eleggua with the Babalawo may indicate that the latter was perceived as something of a trickster and that his role as a messenger, while valued, was viewed with a certain degree of skepticism. The Babalawo's perception as a trickster is reiterated by the fact that his name in the Yoruba language means "father of mysteries" (Matibag 153). The name Baba Elegun is also reminiscent of Papa Legba, the name commonly associated with the trickster among Vodou practices in Haiti (Gates, *Signifying* 5).

The ideas of double-talk, performance, and multi-generational continuity in the context of Cuban slave narratives all have precedents in African culture which may inform the purposes of Montejo and Barnet. Masquerading, dance, iconography, and

music are all thought to provide deceased ancestors and orishas with ways to communicate approval or disapproval of issues in the lives of mortals. Masquerading is also important in West-African culture because it allows for the sanctification of the secular. In Igbo culture, it is thought to lead to the unification of the mask and the person who wears it. In the Egungun festival of the Yoruba, a person wearing a mask is overshadowed by his role as a chosen vehicle through which ancestors communicate (Walker 9). One purpose of communicating with ancestors in this way was to resolve contemporary disputes. The person who did not follow the ancestor's instruction as conveyed via the mask wearer was punished by death (9-10). The use of inanimate objects as mediums of communication between the spiritual and the temporal is related to the West African practice of consecrating objects with the life force *àshe*, which allows them to function as if they were alive (10). It is thought that, in order to be fully actualized, masks and icons must always be accompanied by music and dance (11). This parallels the beliefs regarding *sigidi* and the *nkisi* in critical sources. It also parallels the practices associated with *nganga* in *Biografía*. In the West Indies, it was believed that ancestors and deities could return on *El Día de los Reyes* and be seen in remnants of the material culture (51). Likewise, through Esu's intermediary role as gatekeeper of the spirit world, he is thought to be capable of appearing in the presence of any traditionally minded Yoruba (52-53). Congo Square and *El Día de los Reyes* in Cuba were both locations of emotional significance and performances conducted here were intended to provide emotional release, spiritual sanctification, and metaphysical connections (57).

The goal of Barnet's revisions was to create a readable work in the guise of an autobiography with a narrative struggle. To create what appeared to be an authentic

literary version of someone's life, however, he had to deviate from the version told to him by Montejó (Feal 101). He describes Montejó as an informant and reserves the title of author for himself (102). Barnet's function as ethnographer subsumed the roles of researcher, interviewer, transcriber, translator, editor, patron, and promoter (Feal 102; Kerr 390). Part of his function is summed up in Todorov's description of the ethnologist in *The Conquest of America* as one who "contributes to the reciprocal illumination of one culture by another" (Feal 102). To an extent, he assumes the very identity of the informer whose story he edits, as can be seen in his statement from an interview: "I think that politically I am Black, too, in the sense that I have to become aware of the national culture, and the culture of my country has been highly enriched by African culture (102). Anthropology involves a type of annihilation of the self and an awareness of the other which parallel Barnet's role as editor of Montejó's narrative (González Años 364). A key element of the re-writing of history is the reduction of the self, an act which is present in Barnet's attempt to assume the Montejó's identity (366).

From this, it can be seen that Barnet as an ethnographer does not remain an impartial collector of data (Feal 102). His relationship with Montejó parallels the mutual necessity shared by the European conqueror and the Native American—or African—conquered peoples. In this case, the European was denuded and his language was contaminated. Similarly, Barnet uses Montejó's experience and his identity to liberate himself from the dominant ideological framework of the colonizer or metropolitan (104). To do this, he and Montejó co-create a new narrative that deconstructs the existing historical conscience by showing that the latter consisted of codified beliefs of a period

whose ideological structure has become obsolete (González, *Años* 366). The retelling of this story in print makes it available to a wider audience (Feal 109).

4.16 Montejo's Shaping of His Own *Nkisi*

While Montejo's role is sometimes viewed as inferior to that of Barnet, his contribution to the novel is invaluable. Far from merely providing information, Montejo engages in creative and editorial processes similar to those of Barnet. Hardly a passive agent, he aims to interpret his life as a black slave and second class citizen in Cuba and, in doing so, to engage the past himself rather than accept the white hegemonic version of history (Walters 23). Though illiterate, Montejo was aware of Afro-Cuban and African traditions of oral history and utilizes their techniques to facilitate the process of historical revision. Both he and Barnet knew that speakers in these traditions served as repositories of memory, recreating the dead, enacting and politically evaluating history in order to make people aware of what has been silenced or forgotten (Sternbach 93). For this reason, they used their narrative to create a foil for political discourse that might otherwise silence their account (94).

Montejo, like Barnet, does not adhere strictly to the truth. While this raises the issue of authenticity, it is in keeping with the ideology of slaves who seek to subvert the control of their masters. In different slave communities in both Africa and the Americas, fictional discourse has served as a solution to linguistic enslavement. In addition to misleading its audience through the manipulation of content, it also satirizes the master by parodying his language and behavior (Piedra, *Monkey* 361). Africans used certain tactics to "superficially accept and surreptitiously repel the European outsiders" (370).

Their assimilation was one part of a mutual symbiosis between colonizer and colonized (Piedra, *Monkey* 371). Members of the Kongo culture resisted outside control “by feeding the outsider with only part of their system of signification, or with the makeshift sub-systems which would easily adjust to the will of the colonizer” (374). In a similar manner, many literatures that emerged around the independence of Cuba were based on a mythology of compromise which mimicked and mocked the oppressive code (362). Liberation movements were frequently accompanied by a slave literature that contradicted the literature of the masters. These included letters, memoirs, and life-stories narrated to collaborators in their struggles (Beckles 782). These were considered socially uncompromised and intellectually honest. This literature constitutes the beginning of a post-coloniality, in which a subversive literature goes against the ideas of imperialism (783). It also provides evidence of the bidirectional compromise between colonizer and colonized, or metropolitan and subaltern, and raises the issue of which group is really in control.

Montejo manipulates his narrative in a number of ways to promote his and Barnet’s cultural ideology. They also aim to achieve at least five key goals: rewriting history, integrating African culture, creating multiple levels of fiction, disrupting the Eurocentric hegemonic discourse, and enhancing the narrative’s credibility. In regard to the rewriting of history, Montejo makes numerous claims that his story—in a collective sense—has been mis-told before and that he has to give a correct account. He attempts to re-inscribe authenticity, and yet some of his claims go counter to this. One example of such a counterclaim is the section on the Cuban war for independence (Walters 13). This description includes the fictionalization of Cuban soldiers defeating the Spanish in battle

with machetes (Tone 8). It can be seen in the portrayal of the fighting conditions at Mal Tiempo: “At Mal Tiempo we had to stick together and you had to follow the man who rolled up his sleeves and raised up his machete. Mal Tiempo lasted maybe half an hour, but it was enough to cause more deaths than an inferno. More Spaniards fell there than in all the battles fought together” (Barnet, *Biography* 160). A further example of this hyperbole can be seen in the description of a specific battle: “The fiercest battalion to fight at Mal Tiempo was from the Canary Islands. They were well equipped. Almost all of them died from the same fear of the machete” (161).

Both of these descriptions exploit the image of the machete, a popular symbol of national unity against Spain and the United States (Tone 9). However, evidence in Spanish battle diaries, memoirs, medical records refute these claims and support the idea that the primary battlefield weapon for the Cubans was the rifle (11). Medical records reveal that, of 4187 men treated for wounds in Cuba in 1896, only thirteen percent had been injured by machetes (17-19). The overwhelming majority of wounds throughout the Cuban war for independence came from Remington rifles. In only one instance—Battle of Mal Tiempo—was the machete was the main weapon (21-22). It may be partly for this reason that Montejo chooses to focus on this battle. However, even if the machete was indeed the decisive weapon here, other aspects of the description are inaccurate. The overarching reason for exaggerating the military application of the machete is likely its symbolic power. Its image as the decisive weapon in the Cuban war for independence in spite of medical evidence to the contrary can be seen in the work of Spanish military historians and in displays of Cuban artifacts from the war in the Army Museum in Madrid (10). This myth has also been propagated by writers and historians in the United

States and Latin American countries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Tone 10-11). In spite of uncertainty regarding the machete's historical role, its mythopoetic role is reiterated numerous times. At the end of his narrative, after emphasizing the importance of telling the complete truth about Cuban history, Montejo combines meta-fictional and martial language to reflect both his zeal and the ongoing nature of his struggle against colonial imposition: "That's why I say I don't want to die so that I can fight all the battles yet to come. I won't get into the trenches or use any of these modern weapons. A machete will do for me" (Barnet, *Biography* 200).

Another issue that undermines the narrative's authenticity is Montejo's denial of suicides by blacks during slavery (Piersen 152). He states, "What I do think is a fiction because I never seen it ever, is that the blacks committed suicide. Before, when there were Indians in Cuba, suicide did exist. They didn't want to be Christians and they hung themselves from the trees. But the blacks didn't do that because they went flying, flying in the sky, and headed off for their homeland" (Barnet, *Biography* 42-43). He also claims that blacks went to rivers wearing magical chains by which they were able to return to their homelands (Piersen 153). Montejo's elaboration of what blacks did may be a figurative rendering of the assertion made by some African-American subcultures that those who committed suicide returned to Africa with all of their possessions (151). However, his denial of suicides by blacks is refuted by the numerous cases of mass suicides by black slaves throughout the Americas, which often involved hanging from tree branches or drowning with chains in rivers (152-53). The Mandinga in particular had a tendency toward group suicide (Childs 60). Many slaves, including participants in the mass suicides, believed that after death, they would be brought back to life in Africa

(Johnson 715). Suicide served to achieve a reconnection to familiar spaces through transmigration. It was so common, not only in the West Indies, but also during the Middle Passage, that some ships placed netting over the decks to catch slaves who jumped overboard and, thus, to minimize their losses (Walker 23). The frequency of suicides among slaves is further evidenced by Ortiz' observation that certain punishments were aimed at discouraging it (Camacho, *Fantasmas* 680). For this reason, the legends of flying and or magical chains are likely misinterpretations by Afro-Cubans of suicides that were carried out by hanging in trees or drowning in rivers (Piersen 153). While Montejo supports the claim of flying blacks in the section of the narrative titled "Slavery," in the subsequent section titled "The Abolition of Slavery," he denies it: "There are people who say that when a black dies, he goes back to Africa. That's a lie. How would they go back to Africa. The ones who went back were alive, the ones who flew a lot—a tribe of wild men the Spanish refused to bring here anymore because it wasn't good business. But the dead don't fly!" (Barnet, *Biography* 120)

Both Montejo's affirmative and negative references to flying Africans are significant on a meta-fictional level because they disrupt the hegemonic Eurocentric historical discourse with an Afro-centric discursive feature (Walters 14). In doing so, they reiterate the ideas of struggle and compromise between the two ideological systems. They also function as a type of "incorporated genre" and serve to affirm the "minor self" against the possibility of cultural disappearance (23). These tales, and Montejo's commentary on them, are also important in that they break the continuity of the narration. Instead of mere autobiographical material, they constitute a new level of narration, removed from both narrator and reader, which brings the roles of narrator and reader

closer together. Moreover, the inclusion of the narrator's personal commentary on these secondary tales helps to personalize him for readers. In addition to making reading more pleasurable, the emulation of an interactive relationship between author and public corresponds with the principles of African art and storytelling (Walters 23).

4.17 The Trickster's Role in the Acquisition of Agency

Regarding the question of agency, one must consider the practical and metaphysical goals of both Montejo and Barnet and determine how and to what degree these goals have been achieved. Their achievement may be manifest in various stages of the text's composition, its reception by an audience, and its aftermath. One must also be aware that the historical context and relevant personal experiences of each individual shape both their goals and the criteria for their fulfillment. *Biografía de un cimarrón* is different from the two previously discussed narratives in a number of important ways. First, it was not written by Montejo himself, but was delivered orally by him in response to a series of questions by Barnet. Second, due to Montejo's inability to speak English and his illiteracy, he was unable to proofread Barnet's transcription. For this reason, some may consider Montejo to be at a comparative disadvantage to the other two slave narrators being analyzed in terms of his ability to achieve agency through the medium of a written text. However, Montejo would have been more likely than Juan Francisco Manzano or Abū Bakr eṣ Ṣadīq to utilize his oral account for the purpose of expressing a subtle double meaning that would be undetectable to the general reader unfamiliar with Afro-Caribbean traditions. Even if the text were further manipulated, as happened with *Biografía* via its transcription, translation, and revision, its narrator may still succeed in

achieving agency. This opinion is based partly on the idea that double-talk and the use of metatextual commentary—often done subtly via rhetorical devices—were more in keeping with Montejo's tradition than with the traditions of the other two narrators. Montejo demonstrated an obvious awareness of the Congo and Lucumi cultures in Northwest Africa and frequently alluded to their influence in the Caribbean. In doing so, he underscored important similarities between them and the Yoruba culture from which the trickster Eshu-Elegbara and the meta-tropes *ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi* are derived.

Another reason that Montejo may appear more successful in achieving agency is that, for him, agency is measured differently. Both Manzano and Abū Bakr were still enslaved while composing their narratives, whereas Montejo narrated his account as a free person over seven decades after slavery's abolition in Cuba. For Montejo, therefore, agency cannot be measured in terms of his ability to achieve legal emancipation. Instead, it relates to his self-expression and to the perpetuation of his African identity. While self-expression is also a criterion of agency for the other two narrators, the perpetuation of African identity is not. Manzano attempted to disassociate himself from his African connection through the assimilation of white culture, while Abū Bakr's identity was defined primarily by his Muslim faith. Since Montejo was born into slavery in Cuba and never knew his parents, his African identity was acquired indirectly, partly through the relationship with his grandparents and partly by observation of other slaves. To a degree, Montejo defies tradition through his status as a loner and outsider—a fact evident in his life as a *cimarrón* and in his refusal to ally himself with any particular ethnic group while living in the barracoons, first as a slave and later as a free laborer. Nevertheless, the

numerous references to African culture in his narrative likely serve both as symbols of an indomitable African heritage that has survived the challenges of slavery, and as a metatextual commentary on Montejo's trickster-like role as an agent in the narrative.

It is likely that Barnet was aware of the figurative and metatextual overtones of certain Afro-Cuban cultural references, given his training as an ethnographer, and the fact that some of these same references are found in his other publications, both critical and creative. Two key examples are the critical text *Cultos afrocubanos: la regla de ocha, la regla de palo monte* and the short story "La lechuza y el mono." At times Barnet expresses what appear to be contradictory sentiments about his goals regarding Montejo's legacy. In the Afterword of *Biografía*, he portrays himself primarily as a dedicated facilitator who helps to accurately share the essence of Montejo's experience to a broader audience (Barnet, *Biography* 204-08). However, in a subsequent publication in response to Michael Zeuske's "The *Cimarrón* in the Archives: A Re-reading of Miguel Barnet's Biography of Esteban Montejo," Barnet indicates that he is a poet rather than a historian (Barnet, *Untouchable* 285). He downplays the historical and anthropological importance of his own work, adding that Montejo's true importance is not that of a historical figure, but of the rebel spirit of combat and struggle that lives on in himself (285-87).

In Barnet's view, Montejo was ignored by historians during the first half of the twentieth century because he was waiting for Barnet to find him, and ultimately to recreate him for anthropological literature as someone distinct from his existing representation in the historical archives (Barnet, *Untouchable* 287). He goes so far as to threaten with decapitation anyone who would dare write a second part to Montejo's life. He is opposed to the writing of a sequel for several reasons. He claims that the already

published narrative is valuable because it presents new information on maroon life, and sexual and racial relations during slavery in Cuba from the perspective of a former slave (Barnet, *Untouchable* 284). In contrast, the menial forms of employment which Montejo held after emancipation and the Cuban War of Independence such as cane cutter or school porter are unlikely to be of comparable historical interest (286). Barnet adds that a book on this stage of Montejo's life would undermine the rebellious, heroic image created in *Biografía*. It would be anticlimactic, both in its literal representation of Montejo and in its figurative, anthropomorphic representation of Cuban history. Another likely reason for Barnet's vehement opposition may be Montejo's own attitude about his life. In an interview with Claude du Font, the French translator of *Biografía*, Montejo stated that the finest period of his life was as a slave because, at the time, he was young (287). Without the same *joy de vivre* of his youth, Montejo—like Barnet—may have recognized that any depiction of the later period of his life would be contrary to the self-image that he wished to present.

While Barnet indicates that at least one person with even more information than Zeuske has already proposed such a project, he claims that this person still lacks Montejo's essence—something that he may only access through an interview with Barnet. Barnet claims that the prohibition of a second part has been decided not only by himself, but also by Montejo's spirit and that Montejo will play an active role in preventing the composition of such a work by placing obstacles in the path of those who attempt it (Barnet, *Untouchable* 288). While Barnet never specifies the type of obstacle, it is possible that he is referring implicitly to a hex or *nganga*, such as those concocted by slaves to avenge wrongdoers. Barnet concludes his response to Zeuske by posing the

rhetoical question of whether the real Montej0 is that of Zeuske's more historical work, or that of his own *Biografía* (Barnet, *Untouchable* 289).

By juxtaposing and comparing the merits of historical and literary approaches to biographical representation, Barnet questions the value of historical fact and raises the issue of epistemological irony. Since he seems to favor prioritizing a person's essence over specific events and conditions of his life experience, he appears to support a more literary interpretation. This approach also is in keeping—at least to a certain degree—with the practice of signifyin(g) commonly used in African-American literature and with the idea that the initial, literal message of a text provided by the Yoruba god Ifá is reshaped through interpretation by his counterpart Esu. Barnet reflects this tendency to merge socio-anthropological and literary interests by describing himself as "something like a cross between a falcon and a tortoise" (Barnet, *Biography* 205).

In this statement, Barnet utilizes two important metaphors that elucidate his self-perception. Since a falcon is powerful and potentially deadly raptor that occupies the sky, it may represent the metropolitan entities in higher socioeconomic echelons, which predatorily exploit members of lower classes. Conversely, the tortoise is a humble animal, close to the ground, that lacks strength or weapons and relies on its shell for protection. The tortoise's shell could be a metaphor for the double-talk used by African slaves and their descendents to become assimilated into the metropolitan culture without submitting to it. Also, one particular type of tortoise, the jicotea, is a traditional symbol of the trickster in African and Afro-Cuban folklore. Cabrera claims that the figure of Jicotea is associated with the two Yoruban orishas Elegguá and Osain. Since it is placed within the lowest echelon of animals, it parallels the predicament of slaves (Cabrera 10).

Like slaves, it must use tricks to gain advantage. It is highly conscious of its vulnerability, but is still capable of humiliating the most powerful animals (Cabrera 11). Like the trickster god, the folkloric Jicotea possesses supernatural abilities. Even after death, its heart is thought to continue beating, its eyes to look, its mouth to chew, and its skin to maintain tactile sensitivity. In stories, it is often used to represent blacks in slave society (12). Thus on a figurative level, its traits may represent both the perseverance and the organic interconnectedness of the Yoruba diaspora. Jicotea also has certain traits which suggest parallels with the trickster figure, as well as with Montejo and Barnet. Like the Yoruba trickster, Jicotea is sometimes associated with the devil (107, 111, 113). It is also believed to possess profound wisdom, as can be seen in its description from the story "La excelente doña Jicotea concha...": "Of her lively intelligence, of her good judgment, of her discretion, the peoples highly praise. Her wisdom is astonishing. She was a professor, an Encyclopedia, the old lady" (189).

Some stories, such as "Jicotea y el árbol de güira que nadie sembró" even refer to multiple Jicoteas, an idea that parallels the concept of multiple tricksters (Cabrera 128). Brazilian and Cuban initiates of Candomblé recognize twenty-one types of Eshus or Elegguas, each of which has a different authority, but is still part of the same divinity (Moreno 165). However, it should not be assumed that Jicotea is synonymous with, or a manifestation of, the trickster. In one story, "La porfía de las comadres," Eleguá [sic] is identified as the leader of the group including multiple figures named Jicotea. The identity of Eleguá [sic] is evident in her name and by reference to her habits: "There in her hut, the holy Godmother of the Gossips is seated on her mat speaking with her snails. Eleguá is told everything; what the Gossips had done, and the stage in which they were

found in that instant. The Godmother also laughed; water filled the wrinkles of her face, infantile and old, always happy" (Cabrera 246). The reference to her knowledge of the past and present mirrors the same trait found in Jicotea and Montejo. Her dialogue with snail shells—a principal medium of divination among the Yoruba alluded to by Montejo (Barnet, *Biography* 35)—in which the Jicoteas are co-participants suggests that both Eleguá and Jicotea play cooperative roles in the divination process.

The contradictory yet simultaneously held traits of youth and agedness reflect the alternative portrayals of the Yoruba trickster in other sources as either an old man or a young child (Parsons 39). They also parallel the vivacity that Montejo insinuates about himself, if not for fighting physical battles, then for relating the truth about his experiences and the deeper cosmological truths that they may reveal. While his textual representation throughout most of the narrative is one of youth, his metatextual representation—which superimposes the role of commentator over that of protagonist in the final pages—is one of old age. In a way, this parallels the irony that, although his centenarian status is a key source of his novelty as a narrator, the predominant image by which he will be remembered is his portrayal as a young man. In a didactic sense, the duality of agedness and youth may represent the relationship between the ancient Yoruba episteme and the relatively new country of Cuba, for whom Montejo serves as an intermediary. A further irony may be found in that Montejo's age during his temporal association with each of these two cultural paradigms constitutes the reverse of that paradigm's meaning for Afro-Cuban history.

At a later point in the story, "La porfía de las comadres," the threat by Eleguá [sic] to use Jicotea as an ingredient in a soup may be an attempt by the trickster orisha to

discourage another entity with trickster-like tendencies from challenging her sovereignty. However, it could also be a metaphoric reference to the concoction of *nkisi*, in which Jicotea, with its extensive knowledge, would parallel the dirt used in traditional *nkisi* as a metonymic representation of dead ancestors. Epithets such as “impotent ancient tortoise” and “daughter of the primordial waters” (Cabrera 128) suggest Jicotea’s advanced age and suspected impotence—two other traits that it allegedly shares with Montejo. Montejo may appear impotent, due to his enslavement, his status as a second-class citizen even after his emancipation, his illiteracy, and his seeming inability to correct what he identifies as erroneous claims about Cuba’s history. Nevertheless, the wisdom accrued with age is considered a valuable commodity for him, as for Jicotea.

Water may also serve as an important trope on different levels for the exercise of Jicotea’s power. On a basic level, the expressions “daughter of the primordial waters” (Cabrera 128) and “The waters obey me” (234) both indicate that Jicotea has metonymic, causal connections to a potential instrument of power. Yet each expression favors a different side of the bipartite relationship. The first portrays the waters as the origin of the Jicotea, thus implicitly imbuing it with power over her. Yet the second reverses these roles by granting Jicotea power over the waters. Several parallels exist between the comparison of these two expressions and the meta-tropes *nkisi* and *simbi*. In the first expression, Jicotea’s role parallels that of *nkisi* as a product of the original creative force. In the second, however, the reversal of power implemented by Jicotea parallels *simbi*’s reversal the relationship between signifier and signified. Through the manipulation of signifiers and signifieds, Jicotea may be said to gain control over a text’s meaning, much like how it is portrayed to gain control over the waters. Thus, the waters may be

interpreted as a metaphor for the text—a metaphor that carries implications of amorphousness, indeterminacy, transferability, and liminality. Cabrera's observation that Jicotea uses control of the water to force other animals into submission may, on a meta-fictional level, parallel her views regarding the manipulator of a text (Cabrera 234).

While the image of Jicotea has certain parallels with Montejo, it has others that are more relevant to Barnet. The latter may use the metaphors of a falcon and a tortoise to subtly indicate several things. First, he identifies both with the metropolitan entity as a result of his birth in a privileged social class, and with the subaltern entity through empathy accumulated with his ethnographical subjects. Second, by implicit reference to the trickster figure of Jicotea, he indicates that he himself is a trickster whose identity and loyalty are ambiguous and indeterminate. If this is true, then his empathy with black Cubans may not be due as much to his appropriation of Montejo's black essence as he suggests in his letter to Zeuske. Instead, it may be due to his adoption of an ambiguous, multivalent perspective and mode of expression similar to that typically used in African and Afro-Cuban folklore. Such a perspective is evident in Montejo's ostensible vacillation between action and passivity when one contrasts his temporary submission to both the rules of slavery and the still-harsh post-abolition conditions that existed for blacks with his stints as a runaway and a soldier in the war of Cuban independence. It is also evident in his willingness as a slave and, later, a free laborer to tolerate conditions of social inequality without submitting to the belief in their validity.

The figurative use of an unnatural hybridization of animals with a trickster connotation is not unique to Barnet. Montejo also uses such a combination when describing the Mambises revolutionary fighters with whom he fought in the war of

independence (Yúdice 211). While Spanish references to Cuban fighters as savages and Mambises was likely derisive, for Barnet it was a point of pride (Barnet, *Biography* 162). He indicates that at the Battle of Mal Tiempo, mambi became a lion. He also alludes to mambi's mythical origin as the child of a monkey and a buzzard (163). This claim's most obvious symbolic significance would be the transition from powerlessness to strength, which, at least in theory, accompanied slaves' emancipation. Also, both monkey and buzzard are trickster figures. While the monkey is more common in Yoruba folklore, the buzzard is also granted trickster status, partly due to his role as a scavenger. While not a powerful animal, the buzzard may consume the remains of other animals many times its size, sometimes appropriating them from other scavengers or even violent predators. The claim that the Mambises were a decisive force in the war may be an example of mythopoetic scavenging on the part of black soldiers, who appropriated credit for a military victory—one largely decided by white Cubans wielding rifles—in order to exaggerate their role in Cuba's struggle for independence.

The use of trickster figures inevitably brings up the question of agency, both in the realization of deeds and in their historical and literary representations. There is no doubt that Barnet demonstrates a certain degree of agency through his questioning of Montejo, his transcription and revision of Montejo's answers into the format of a book, and his translation of the book from Spanish to English. Not only does Barnet gain unprecedented access to information on the topic of Cuban slavery from an eyewitness and former slave; he also controls the manner in which this information is presented and increases its availability through his translation. What is less certain is whether Barnet's role as interviewer, amanuensis, editor, and translator impedes Montejo's agency.

Another question related to the idea of trickery is Barnet's use the term "Autobiography" rather than "Biography" in the title of *Biografía's* English translation. He may have felt that "Autobiography" would lend greater credibility to the work. Ironically, he probably doubted the validity of this view, given his own knowledge of how a person's first-hand perspective may bias self-representation. It is also possible that his addition of the prefix "auto-" was intended, albeit subtly, to imply that the story was a representation not only of Montejo's life but also, figuratively speaking, of his own. This brings to mind the oft-suggested function of *Biografía* as an allegory for the history of Cuba, in which case it could be viewed as a story of all Cubans. But given his close association with Montejo as expressed in his response to Zeuske's article, it may also be a personal statement about Barnet.

Although Barnet is not a former slave and does not claim to be of African descent, he may have chosen to adopt his account of Montejo's life as an extended metaphor for his own identity. Since Barnet was born into relative privilege, his struggles in a quotidian context do not compare with those of Montejo. However, there may be subtle yet significant parallels between Montejo's life and Barnet's professional work. As a writer who delves into both ethnography and literature, the strictures of analyzing and representing information in certain formats and based on certain theories of interpretation may be perceived as a type of slavery that he desires to escape. If this is the case, his compilation, reworking, and publication of Montejo's account may serve as his own self-liberating move, making him a metaphoric *cimarrón*. Barnet claims that Montejo's statements about his experience as a slave were new for the history of Cuba. Thus they contribute both historically and esthetically to Barnet's written version in a way that

information about Montejo's later life would not (Barnet, *Untouchable* 284). A parallel to this can be seen in Barnet's discussion of the testimonial novel's function. He states that the appropriate balance of historical fact and idiosyncratic essence:

is only attained by sharpening the ability to hear the intonations and the music of history, to hear the most guarded, introspective form of oral discourse. It is a nourishment needed retroactively at this level of communication in order to achieve the real understanding of identity. I think that in language lies the key to this knowledge and for this strategy. All lives are important but one has to know how to extract from them the tone of their universal resonance. (Barnet, *Biography* 206)

Several points here merit attention because of their connection to the role of the trickster Esu in Yoruba culture. First, the collaboration of the two principal figures involved in dealing with divine texts—Ifá who produces the text, and Esu who interprets it—constitutes an intersection of oral and written discourse, as well as a type of retroactive animation of the original text for the purpose of communicating its essential meaning. Also, the mention of music, while partly figurative, may also allude to the musical quality of the interpretation of divine Ifá texts by a Babalawo. It may also be a reference to the idea of divine inspiration, implicit in the idea of the muse. Barnet proceeds to emphasize the role of language for communicating the essence of history and, in doing so, underscores the chief medium used by Ifá and Esu for communication with each other and with humans.

Elsewhere in the Afterword, Barnet connects the process of writing to his own experience, and it is here that his potential parallel with the experience of Montejo's youth becomes more apparent:

If the period prior to the entry of Fidel Castro in Havana had been tedious and anxiety-provoking, what followed was a time of excitement and jubilation. Identity, our most intimate subject matter, so obscure and amorphous for other

countries, was revealed in all its potency in the pristine years of my training as a writer and ethnologist. (Barnet, *Biography* 204-05)

First, the anxiety during the years prior to Castro's government could parallel that experienced by Montejo during his enslavement. Second, the identities of Cuba, and of Barnet, were revealed in a period that, while post-revolutionary, still formed a part of Barnet's youth. In this sense, they could parallel the revelation of Montejo's identity as a *cimarrón* during his youth, an identity which, though allegedly evident to Montejo from birth (22), may have become more meaningful to him during his actual escape. The discoveries that he made while a fugitive occurred during early adulthood, thus paralleling the timing of Barnet's professional training. These observations do not prove that Barnet viewed his published text as a coded autobiographical account of his own, but they do allow for the possibility. As such, they reinforce the idea that *Biografía* contains a hidden subtext that transcends the experience of Montejo and the allegorical representation of Cuba to demonstrate the continuity of key Yoruba traditions including storytelling, interpretation, ambiguity, and trickery. If so, it is in keeping with the tradition of the African trickster, a tradition of which Barnet may see himself as a part.

Barnet makes a number of statements in his Afterword which suggest just such a complicity. These include the discussion of theoretical aspects of his own testimonial writing process as well as references to symbols associated with the Yoruba trickster Esu. He states, "The insertion of history into a new narrative, working like a compass and a walking stick, has meant as much for subjectivism as for testimonial realism, the two tendencies that go linked together in a single strategy that incites and provokes new ideological trails" (Barnet, *Biography* 204). On a theoretical level, Barnet suggests an ideological transformation in the field of historical writing that is realized by the

combination of both objective and subjective elements. He proposes that the content of such a text is still historical in nature, but is presented in a new format—the narrative—which deviates from the existing historical trend. It is possible that his use of the word "narrative" implies a predominance of mimesis in the testimonial novel, as opposed to the typical predominance of diegesis in nominally historical texts. This being said, historical texts may contain mimetic elements, just as testimonials may contain diegetic ones. The majority of diegetic content in *Biografía* is found in the Afterword, rather than in the narrative. However, there are occasional diegetic commentaries ostensibly made by Montejo interspersed within the account of his life.

While the compass and the walking stick may be fairly obvious symbols of how Barnet's strategy serves to provide both direction and balance to his own genre of writing, the walking stick in particular may have a deeper meaning through its connection with Legba. The most common depiction of Legba is an old man who carries an old cane and limps down the road. His shabby clothes, corncob pipe, and straw bag all suggest poverty, while his limp and cane suggest weakness and vulnerability. However, according to Yoruba legend, his cane is really a gateway between heaven and Earth that allows the various orishas to enter ceremonies. His limp is not due to a handicap but to the placement of each of his feet in a different world—one in the material and other in the spiritual. In spite of his ostensible frailty, he is capable of taking power from those who traditionally possess it as well as providing it to those who lack it (Filan 74). Since all of these accoutrements mislead the viewer by portraying Legba as something that he is not, they reinforce his ambiguous and paradoxical nature, and may be used to represent it metonymically. Thus Barnet's comparison of the insertion of history into the narrative to

a walking stick suggests that, while such a practice may indeed serve to create a more powerful text and thus empower its author, its factual reliability, like Legba's reliability as a messenger, is indeterminate.

Later in the Afterword, Barnet claims that the testimonial novel "should represent the world in reverse" (Barnet, *Biography* 207). One implication is that this genre should renew the foundational language of the older genre of the historical novel, something which Barnet tries to achieve by emulating Montejo's speech. However, his statement may also suggest a shift of both the conditions in the world and the hierarchies that they represent. His reference to the anthropomorphic Cuban fable (205), while not explicitly tied to slavery, could subtly reiterate the idea that his liberating reversal of literary and historiographical trends is a symbolic parallel for emancipation and an outgrowth of Afro-Cuban cultural development.

Julia Cuervo Hewitt establishes a connection between reading and divination in her book *Aché, presencia africana*. She purports that the contemporary narrator, the testimonial narrator, and the modern reader need the same interpretative perspicacity as the Babalawo (Matibag 151). She claims that "In Ifá, one performs a discursive, intertextual act in which myth and personal history are made to interact through the medium of language." Her observations parallel Giambattista Vico's writings on the "divination" practiced by the ancient "theological poets," which Vico referred to as "the science of the language of the gods" (qtd. in 152). They also echo Aristotle's claim that poetry may be more scientific than history, an assertion to which Barnet alludes in his Afterword, thus potentially hinting at a prophetic aim of his own (Barnet, *Biography* 205). As an oracle, Ifá is effectively "an orally delivered prophecy that transmits a body

of interconnected texts belonging to 'oral literature'" (Matibag 154). Further, if it bases its prophecy on literary foundations, it shows how a community can preserve, organize, and transmit narratives that explain the human experience (167). The Ifá oracle provides a model for organizing existing narratives and creating future ones. It forms a narrative from experience and makes a connection between this and social and cosmic patterns of meaning. It also provides a way to interpret the meaning of random events (159). Likewise, since Barnet considers Montejo's personal role in the history of Cuba to be unremarkable, he may value it more on an ideological level (Barnet, *Untouchable* 286). Barnet recognizes Montejo's function both as a repository of older oral texts and as a revolutionary in his own right, and executes the next stage in the process of Ifá divination by formulating a text of his own that subsumes both Montejo's words and actions.

4.18 Interpolated Stories within the Broader Narrative

An important strategy used by Montejo that is reminiscent of the Ifá oracle is the incorporation of stories told by the elderly. Given the elderly's association with the preservation of African collective memory, their inclusion aims to enhance the credibility of Montejo's account (Pizarro 174). Not surprisingly, his portrayal of them emphasizes this trait. He introduces the depiction of elderly black men by saying, "They were sincere about everything." He later adds, "Even though they were short on talk, they liked you to listen to them when they spoke. They talked about the land, about Africa, about animals and ghosts. They didn't go around gossiping or joking. Anyone who told them a lie got punished severely" (Barnet, *Biography* 147). By portraying them in this manner, he aims to directly enhance their credibility and to indirectly enhance his own.

Other examples of the elderly's role in the preservation of memory are the stories told by Ma Lucía. These include tales—some recounted in the novel, other merely alluded to—that provide examples of African folklore which continue to form a part of the Afro-Cuban cultural consciousness. Some describe sociological conditions, such as the traditional roles of different genders, and are meant to be interpreted literally. Others are parables that are thought to teach moral lessons or universal truths. One such tale is the story of the tortoise and the toad. In it, the toad, who is afraid of the tortoise, tricks its larger neighbor by luring it to gorge itself on food. After the tortoise falls into a deep sleep as a consequence of its gluttony, the toad poisons it by urinating on it. The moral of the story is that one should be neither greedy nor gullible (Barnet, *Biography* 149).

The use of interpolated tales has several purposes, all of which relate to the ideological goals of Montejo and Barnet. First, they serve to propagate African cultural heritage. In doing so, they demonstrate the method of oral cultural transmission that was practiced in Africa, transported to Cuba, and ultimately perpetuated in Cuba. They also show how cultural transmission through storytelling is continued up to the present in speaking by Montejo and in writing by Barnet. Since such stories were valued for their wisdom, they also provide an example of how wisdom can be preserved and shared by oral rather than written means.

Confirmation of this idea can be seen in Montejo's comment: "They taught me many things although they didn't know how to read or write. Customs are more important than information" (Barnet, *Biography* 150). The de-emphasis of literacy's importance is symbolically significant in that it represents an African cultural trait in conflict with a European one. Given literacy's long history as an instrument of power in

European-based civilizations, either through its eradication, its limited imposition, or its promotion as a means of reinforcing assimilation, the idea of wisdom being propagated by non-literary means constitutes a challenge to the European-based ideology. It relates to the idea of cultural compromise between the colonizers and the colonized that was inherent in the conquest of the Americas and a key theme of its literature (Feal 102, 104). This compromise parallels the struggle between masters and slaves as well as that between metropolitans and subalterns. It could also be represented symbolically by the story of the tortoise and the toad, which Barnet may utilize as an allegory of the struggle between Afro-Cubans and their white enslavers. If so, its lesson could be that in spite of blacks' disadvantages from a European perspective, they may liberate themselves by means of their own wisdom both from the physical bondage of slavery and the cultural bondage of Eurocentric ideology.

Although such an interpretation might correspond with Barnet's goal, it may go beyond the story's intended meaning in African and Afro-Cuban oral traditions. In this case, Barnet's use of the story, even if well-intentioned, could be seen as a metropolitan reading of a subaltern text. Barnet may incorporate such stories partly in an attempt to preserve remnants of African heritage in the broader Cuban consciousness. This goal is compatible with his attestation that, of the more than 405 Yoruba divinities in Nigeria, only thirty are recognized in Cuba (Barnet, *Cultos* 41). Yet in realizing such an aim, he risks perpetuating an image of semiotic subjugation in which blacks are seen as dependent on whites for the interpretation and dispersion of their wisdom outside of their own cultural milieu. Moreover, by appropriating for his own use an authentic Afro-Cuban text, or *nkisi* as it were, Barnet acquires the ability to reverse the relationship

between the signifier and signified, and in doing so, to achieve the culminating meta-trope *simbi*. While such a reversal may be inadvertent on his part, it constitutes a veritable risk of any act of interpretation. It also illustrates how at least two concepts associated with signification—and deception—are central to any exchange of information or power.

4.19 Achieving Agency by Controlling the Inscription of the Word

While the title *Biografía de un cimarrón* suggests a story about the life of an individual, it also alludes to the experiences of others, paying particular attention to disadvantaged people who used agency to improve their situations, such as other African slaves, Chinese indentured servants, and Cuban revolutionaries. Describing their success in achieving agency may be a metonym for the agency achieved by Montejo as an individual, the broader slave population, and the Cuban population as a whole. The book is also meant to serve as a repository for the subaltern Afro-Cuban memory and as a foil for the hegemonic metropolitan Cuban political memory which might otherwise silence blacks' account. In effect, it challenges the traditional Western historical canon in terms of form and content by promoting an Afro-Cuban canon that portrays a segment of Cuban history through the use of non-Western techniques. Together, Barnet and Montejo succeed in portraying the experience of slaves in Cuba from a new perspective. In doing so, they demonstrate both the survival of African historical techniques and their efficacy in perpetuating the historical conscience of neglected people whose voices have not been heard. By extension, they challenge the hegemonic historical conscience of Cuba by attempting to subvert it with a different historical conscience from the perspective of a

former slave. While some of the narrative's content is historically accurate and its verisimilitude is enhanced through the use of first-hand testimony, the conscious manipulation of its form and content by both collaborators prevents it from being a fully authentic historical document.

While remnants of the Yoruba influence in the broader Cuban culture do not, in and of themselves, constitute evidence of agency on the part of collaborators in a slave narrative, especially if they are observed prior to its publication, they do parallel it in certain ways. While very little is said explicitly about Santería in *Biografía*, it is practiced by the vast majority of Cubans and is an offshoot of the Yoruba religion (Ogundayo 201). Since the Yoruba influence is considered the chief symbol of African resistance against slavery, colonization, and domination, its flourishing in an officially atheistic country is like an unwritten subtext which coexists with—and, to a degree, undermines—the official account (200). Similarly, one may view evidence of the Yoruba subtext in *Biografía* as a form of agency on the part of both Montejo and Barnet. This may be seen on the literal level via Montejo's references to Yoruba practices and beliefs such as the production of hexes, the game of maní (Barnet, *Biography* 31) and mayombe (27), the orishas *Eleggua* (35, 36), *Obatalá* (35), the use of the name Jicotea for a district of Cuba (42), and in Barnet's invocation of the orisha Changó in the Afterword (208). It is also evident on both literal and figurative levels through the incorporation of Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes *ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi* as cultural referents, rhetorical devices, and symbolic components in the anthropomorphic representation of Cuba.

Agency is also achieved through Montejo's and Barnet's emulation of the semiotic roles of the Yoruba orishas Ifá and Esu (Esu being an alternate name for Eleggua) (Gates,

Signifying 5), and through their mutual emulation of the Babalawo who interprets old texts for new audiences. For both men, emulation serves as a form of cultural perpetuation, which in turn constitutes proof of agency. The fact that emulation of the Yoruba culture is shared by a member of the African diaspora—Montejo—and a white ethnographer—Barnet—is significant because it transcends both chronological and racial barriers. It also constitutes a reversal of the more typical cross-cultural mimesis in slave-holding societies in which the subaltern imitates the metropolitan. Evidence of emulation on the metropolitan level exists in other contexts as well. In a letter to Domingo del Monte, Félix Tanco y Bosmeniel—a contemporary of the slave author Juan Francisco Manzano—asks, “Who sees us in the monuments of our young men...and women when they are dancing contradanzas and vales, an imitation of the mimic of the blacks in their cabildos?” (Del Monte *Centón*, 4: 107-08; Walker, 111). In 1928, President Gerardo Machado planted a Ceiba tree in the Park of Brotherhood near the Cuban capital building to ensure Santeros of the president's protection from his enemies by the Yoruba orisha Changó (Niell 103-04). More recently, Fidel Castro attributed his own success in battle to the assistance of the Yoruba orisha and trickster figure Elegguá [sic] (McMurray 23).

While the Cuban testimonial novelistic genre, for which *Biografía* is recognized as a foundational work, has ostensibly been influenced largely by whites, its more subtle rhetorical devices and cultural references will likely continue to emulate those of the Afro-Caribbean tradition. Barnet acknowledges this in an interview, by stating that his goal is “to clear the intricate maze of Cuban wilderness where the Yoruba and Bantú elements, still alive today, and in their most splendid flowering, are offered here, placed as accessible concepts for the non-initiated” (qtd. in Sanchez 28). Barnet's statement is

significant on several levels. Given his creative adaptation of the text and his admission of withholding information about Montejo both from other scholars and from the general reading public, his stated goal of clarity is ironic and, to an extent, even deceitful. His language, while figurative, carries a religious overtone suggesting his own role as a metaphoric Babalawo and intermediary who perpetuates African culture among twentieth-century Cubans. Further, his reference to Yoruba and Bantú elements as offerings suggests that the perpetuation of these elements has become a goal in itself, albeit a superficial goal. Cultural elements—especially those of foreign origin—generally function as signifiers to be interpreted, rather than as signifieds or interpretations. However, their interpretation among the population at large—when it does occur—is generally shallow or misguided. They are often reduced to symbols of national, religious, or ethnic identity and pride in which they represent their home culture and nothing more. Barnet's stated goal of perpetuating these elements—without any clear attempt to facilitate their interpretation—suggests that they have become goals in and of themselves. They may function as sources of ethnic pride for Afro-Cubans, yet their deeper meanings will be largely ignored, except in the practice of Santería, where they have been syncretized with elements of Catholicism.

By transferring what was previously the object of interpretation (the signifier) to the status of a goal (the signified), Barnet has effectively reversed the paradigm, an act that parallels the dialectical shift between *nkisi*—one of whose meanings is the relationship between signifier and signified—and *simbi*, which, in addition to its association with the monkey Coco Macaco and its trickster connotation, constitutes *nkisi*'s reversal. Given Barnet's familiarity with Afro-Caribbean traditions, and his

detailed analysis of certain of their concepts in his other publications, the goal of perpetuating superficial cultural symbols seems unlikely. Granted, his more analytical works may be aimed at a more informed audience, whereas the less analytical ones are intended for a broader readership. This difference is reminiscent of the Yoruba distinction between Esu texts for audiences more fully versed in Yoruba cosmology, and Ijapá texts intended for untrained audiences and children. Nevertheless, the intermediary role which Barnet perceives for himself in the presentation of Afro-Cuban texts may be interpreted by some people as a form of dominance and potential semiotic corruption, reminiscent of that which the trickster Esu wields over the texts of Ifá. Piedra claims that *àshe* in the Yoruba tradition, like *logos* in the Greek one, is essentially a controlled inscription of the word (Piedra, *Monkey* 389). When one considers this in light of *àshe*'s more commonly accepted definition—the power to make things happen—which is virtually synonymous with the concept of agency, it is fair to say that both Montejo and Barnet demonstrate agency by sharing their spoken and written texts—and corresponding subtexts—with different audiences.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have sought to show how the trickster figure is a necessary trope for the achievement of agency by the protagonists of the three slave narratives *Autobiografía de un esclavo*, “Routes in North Africa by Abú Bekr eş şiddīk” [sic], and *Biografía de un cimarrón*. I have also attempted to demonstrate how each protagonist's realization of this role and of agency depends on the use of Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes: *ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi*. By focusing on inherent similarities between these four tropes and the four master tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, one may see that cross-cultural similarities exist between Yoruba and Western rhetorical applications; that multiple levels of meaning and degrees of rhetorical complexity comparable to those of Western canonical texts may be found even in ostensibly simple slave narratives; and that even narratives without explicit references to meta-tropes may serve to perpetuate these tropes' symbolic values as they relate to the survival of subaltern cultures. These truths also relate to and are evident in parallels between rhetorical tropes, racial categories, slaves, and texts regarding their potential for classification, alteration, perpetuation, and destruction. In other words, racial categories, slaves and texts may be said to function as tropes.

This dissertation should also demonstrate how various measures taken by the three slave protagonists in the process of assimilation—or transculturation, to use the term coined by Ortiz—are inherently metaphoric, metonymic, synecdochic, and/or ironic,

and that stages in the the process of assimilation as identified by Ortiz corresponds with these tropes (Ortiz, *Relations* 22-24). It should also make evident that various components of binary oppositions such as difference versus similarity, concealment versus revelation, animation/perpetuation versus death, and freedom versus slavery are co-dependent, both in the derivation of their meanings and in their practical realization. In short, it may be said that the negative term in each duality is in some ways necessary for the realization of its positive counterpart and for the empowerment of the protagonist implied therein.

5.1 Methods of Racial Classification and Their Rhetorical Parallels

Related to their applications to social mobility, rhetorical concepts also exhibit important parallels with systems of racial taxonomy. In fact, the key differences between Old and New-World systems are generally explicable in rhetorical terms. In the Old World context, classification was based primarily on culture and national origin (Diggs 417). It stressed cultural factors, religion, and proof of lineage—aspects of identity that are primarily historical and diachronic. Newcomers who wished to become part of the empire were required to undergo tests of *Hispanidad* in courts. The goal of this was assimilation with the mythical Hispanic (Spanish-speaking) race. Establishing purity of blood involved a trial of faith, race, and national origin and usually ended in an *auto-da-fe*. In reality, such events were theatrical performances that served to provide an appearance of legitimacy, both for misguided racial beliefs and for people whose lives were influenced by them. People in power used such rituals as a means of maintaining the status quo. Yet marginalized people could sometimes exploit them for their own

benefit as well. For instance, some prominent black citizens falsely accused themselves of crimes which could be proven untrue at the trial (Piedra, *Literary* 308). Their purpose was to gain access to an official audience either for their writing or for defending rights which could not otherwise be brought to court (308-09). Light-colored people of lower status could gain higher stature through language. Castilian language and literature were two key tools used by marginalized people to improve their standing. Most inquisitorial trials against them dealt with either language or magic. Prior to the discovery of the New World, literature was thought to be produced only by the wealthy and highborn (309). The emphasis on cultural or religious factors in Old-World systems of racial classification and authentication is largely synecdochic, due to the assumption of part-whole relationships between cultures or religions and their members, as well as shared intrinsic qualities among members of a group. The attention to lineage is metonymic, given its emphasis on relationships and contiguity. In a subtle way, the focus on lineage takes into consideration the part-whole relationship between a family or clan and its members, and the assumed intrinsicality of shared family traits. In doing so, it reiterates the similarity or overlap of the two tropes metonymy and synecdoche.

In contrast, racial classification in the Americas placed more emphasis on skin color and physical attributes—a practice which, by focusing on a synchronic attribute—as opposed to the more diachronic attribute of ancestry—is primarily metaphoric. In keeping with this metaphoric approach, a classificatory nomenclature was established in the seventeenth century. The categories within it were based primarily on skin color, yet other criteria were used as well. These included texture and color of hair, eyes, nose, lips, body structure, width of face. In early colonial Spanish America, there were five

principle racial categories: pure whites, Euro-mestizos (mainly Spaniards), mestizos (with either African or Indian ancestry), blacks, and Indians. Those referred to as "pure whites" were European and considered to be "Old Christians," unmixed and of pure ancestry. This was influenced by the European belief that an ancestry devoid of Jewish or Moorish blood constituted a type of nobility. However, the gradual interbreeding of people who were already considered to be of mixed blood led to the formation of new categories (Diggs 405). While the creation of new categories may be seen as a tacit acknowledgement of the diachronic and metonymic quality of ethnic labeling, it still does not emphasize the relative fixity of identity and class associated with genealogical record keeping. In the Americas, many people were still conscious of ancestry, yet the classificatory system emphasized appearance—a more fluid quality that allowed greater potential for social mobility among people who were not considered white. Such fluidity could exist both inter-generationally in terms of physical changes between parents and offspring, and intra-generationally regarding differences in skin color, hair color and texture, and facial features among siblings. Although racial classification in the New World differed from its Old-World counterpart by prioritizing appearance over ancestry, it was still an outgrowth of two interrelated European—specifically Iberian—practices. The first of these was the classification of people based on the ideal of blood purity (Sweet 9). The second was the interpretation of blackness as the antithesis of this ideal. These two customs provided opportunities for Africans to whiten themselves, but also reinforced the negative stereotypes of blackness and Africa. In doing so, they gave rise to a virtually limitless number of possible racial categories and created an increasingly complex visual hierarchy (10).

The increase in the number of ethnic categories—or metaphors—used to classify people in the New-World did not eliminate the metonymic and synecdochic factors that contributed to their identities. Changes that might give rise to a new category occurred incrementally and over time. However, the emphasis on a person's current appearance generally obscured historical connections and, thus, increased the likelihood of a label's inaccuracy. A sampling of categories that have been added to the initial five include *castizos*, *moriscos*, *albinos*, *torno-atras*, *sambayos*, *cambujos*, *albarazados*, *barcinos*, *coyotes*, *chamizos*, *chinos*, *ahiteestas*, *tente en el aire*, *no teentiendo*. With each new generation, the ethnic composition became more complex and its accurate identification became more difficult. Newly coined names to accommodate changes included *negros atezados* (*retintos*) and *negros amembrillados* (*amulatados*). The category *negros amembrillados* (*amulatados*) also contained sub-groups based on hair texture: *cafres de pasa* (crisp short hair, "grapes"); *merinos* (crisp but longer hair); *mulatos blancos*, *claros*, *moriscos* (white, light and dark mulattoes). Sub-categories of mulattos included *mulato prieto*, *mulato pardo* and *mulato anegrado*. Sub-categories of mestizos included *mestizo pardo* and *mestizo prieto*. Names explicitly referring to the criterion of color included *color pardo*, *color de rapadura*, *color champurrado*, *color amarillito*, *color de membrillo*, *color quebrado*, *color cocho*, *color zambaigo*, *color loro* (Diggs 407).

The multiplicity of racial categories was not limited to the colonial period. Research conducted by Gates reflects the following categories in Cuba in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: *negro azul*, *negro color teléfono*, *negro coco timba*, *negro cabeza de puntilla*, *negro*, *moro*, *mulato*, *indio*, *mulato chino*, *mulato color cartucho*, *mulato blanconazo*, *trigueño*, *jabao colorao chino*, *blanco*, *rubio*, *blanco*

orillero, *blanco lechoso*, *albino*. Additional categories discovered by Tomás Fernández Robaina include *negro*, *negro achinado*, *negro moro*, *moreno*, *mlato indiao* (a variant spelling of *mulato indio*), *mestizo*, *jabao* or *java*, *blanco capirro*, *moro*, and *afro cubano* (Gates, *Latin* 232). Large numbers of categories existed in other countries as well: the Dominican Republic had 12 skin color categories; Mexico had 16; Brazil had 134 (10).

To a certain degree, both Old and New-World systems of racial taxonomy parallel the general system of rhetorical classification. Of course, it is impossible for any system of racial classification to correspond exactly with a system of rhetorical devices. One reason for this is differing rates of change between systems. The Western rhetorical taxonomy, based on Aristotle's theory, has remained largely fixed from antiquity to the present. In contrast, the racial classification system of the New World has been in a state of continual flux, with new categories being coined to represent combinations of complexions and other features that were still unaccounted for. No racial category may be given a precise association with any particular trope; for that matter, it may be argued that each category possesses traits of all tropes. Yet, what are arguably the two most common rhetorical trends—signification of one idea for another, which corresponds with metaphor; and intertextuality, which corresponds with metonymy—are intrinsic to the meaning of each racial category and to the functionality of the system as a whole. The contradictory—and thus rhetorical—nature of terminology for classifying slaves had already been noted by seventeenth-century Jesuit priest Arturo de Sandoval (Sweet 10).

While all racial categories are metaphoric in that they make classifications based on appearance, some also contain metonymic, synecdochic, and even ironic features. Different subcategories beginning with *negro*, *mulato*, or *color* each contain further terms

that highlight distinctive features. The part-whole relationships indicated here constitute subcategories which pertain to a whole category and thus correspond with metonymy and synecdoche. The names of some categories are clearly ironic. These include *torno atras* and *salto atras*, both of which indicate a reversal in the direction of traits that have gradually been acquired throughout the ancestral chain. In doing so, they constitute a reversal of the relationship between signifier and signified. Others, such as *ahiteestas*, *tente en el aire*, and *no teentiendo* explicitly refer to the dilemma of racial indeterminacy that, on a broader scale, may refer to all people, including those who are generally considered white. Names whose first term is *negro* are also ironic, since the color indicated by their second term will necessarily contradict the meaning of the first term—black. Three key examples of this phenomenon are *negro retinto* (double dyed negro), *negro amulado* (mulatto-like negro), *negro amembrillado* (quince-like negro)—the last two of which are sometimes used interchangeably (Diggs 407, Sweet 10). In each of the latter three categories, one may also find evidence of other master tropes.

Each of the latter three classifications is metaphoric since it represents an abstract concept which has neither an exact definition nor an absolute manifestation in the flesh. It is metonymic due to the contiguous nature of its primary term in regard to other primary terms and in regard to its own secondary term. The part-whole relationship implied by the relation between the primary and secondary terms is both metonymic and synecdochic. The primary term, *negro*, is synecdochic in that it suggests a certain intrinsicity that will always be present and evident in spite of future alterations (White, *Metahistory* 36). Some of the secondary terms are also synecdochic, but for a different and somewhat contradictory reason. Since *amulado* and *amembrillado* refer to lighter

colors, they suggest an optimistic outlook by implying that someone labeled by this color is closer to achieving what was considered the ideal of whiteness than a person simply labeled *negro*. In contrast, *retinto* has a more pessimistic tone—in keeping with metonymy—since it suggests a reinforcement of the existing condition of blackness. By constituting a passive but positive link between the individual and tradition, it is also similar to the Afro-Caribbean trope *nkisi* that corresponds with metonymy. Another important aspect of synecdoche is the awareness of reversibility (White, *Tropics* 73). Virtually any two-term racial classification in which the second term refers to a deviation from the first term reflects this awareness. Thus, such a term tacitly intimates that its bearer possesses a liminal status and may be labeled with either term depending on the preponderance of her own physical traits and on the perspective of the viewer. Further, the physical traits of this person's offspring may deviate from those of the parent in either direction, in which case the trajectory of whitening—sought after by many of the African diaspora as a means of social mobility—may either continue or be reversed.

Terms of racial classification may also be ironic. In keeping with irony's negational tendency, any label may overshadow or negate the implications of labels used for a person's ancestors (White, *Metahistory* 34, 37). While the residual effect of ancestry may never be entirely eliminated, the metonymic aspect of genealogy is de-emphasized and overshadowed in favor of appearance. This feature is reminiscent of White's observation about irony:

Thus the trope of irony, in which falsehood is presented as truth, constitutes the limit of figurative characterizations of reality; for an ironic utterance is not merely a statement about reality, as metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche are, but presupposes at least a tacit awareness of the disparity between a statement and the reality it is supposed to represent. (White, *Tropics* 208)

In a way, this statement relates to the mindset of the process of whitening, since people used it as a means of becoming something that they were not. Although it is impossible to alter one's genealogy, it is possible to change one's physical appearance, level of education, cultural milieu, and "official" racial classification. In the late 1700s, the Royal Edict of Aranjuez allowed people to change their official racial identity for an amount of money (Diggs 424). In Brazil, people could advance their color status by earning money, or by adapting their behavior, speech, or mode of dress (Gates, *Latin* 36).

Two important ironies associated with the word *negro* are its sometime use for people who lacked African ancestry, and its acquisition of non-racial connotations. By the second half of fifteenth century, *negro* was essentially synonymous with "slave" in the Iberian peninsula. King's slaves were called "His Majesty's Negros" in Spain. Europeans observed different colors of skin of slaves (Sweet 7). This was commented on in 1494 by Jerónimo Münzer. In Brazil, the term *negro* even referred to native Americans who were enslaved. Slave inventories in Bahia in 1570s and 1580s divided slaves into two categories *negros de terra* (Indians) and *negros de guiné* (Africans) (8). The term *negro* became a signifier for the presumed status of all sub-Saharan Africans, and American Indians as slaves (9). Evidence of this was also found in use by the English, Dutch, and French of variations of the term *negro* to denote slaves, rather than translations for the color "black" in their own languages. This was because the term *negro* conveyed a meaning not yet present in the words for "black" (20).

The inherent falsehood of racial classification was used not only by subalterns for social mobility but also by members of the upper classes for self-preservation. Racial diversity did exist among the privileged classes and often reflected African ancestry. Yet

such traits were routinely hidden for fear that they would reveal a person's impurity (from a white European perspective) and, thus, inferiority. In a sense, race—along with culture, nationality, and religion—was used as a trope for categorizing both the enslaved and the free. More importantly, it served to maintain the barrier between these two meta-groups by overshadowing connections between them and disavowing the possibility of their co-existence as equals. Like a rhetorical trope that subsumes a function or attribute of another, almost every racial classification used in the Caribbean contains at least an implicit reference to another classification. This is true even for black and white—colors which represent opposites and ideological extremes of the racial spectrum in Caribbean slaveholding society. Since they represent abstract, artificial concepts, their true manifestation in a racial system is impossible. As such, they perpetuate the myth of racial purity by masking the existence of impurities even where they are not perceptible. As a result, each racial classification, similar to each trope, exists not in a pure form but as the product of other classifications that combine to form something enriched, liminal, and potentially indeterminate.

5.2 Slave-Owning Slaves, Odus, and the Semiotic Power of a Text

In some ways, a slave-owning slave also parallels the concepts *ejí* and *mejí* in the Ifá divination system. Due to their newly intermediate status as both slave owners and slaves, they parallel the status of the Odus, who are neither spirit nor deity (Buckley 193). Like the names *ejí* and *mejí*, whose change in pronunciation—and potential change in meaning—shifts the role of those who influence the changes from recipients to emissors, slave-owning slaves undergo a partial shift from formal passivity to formal activity. To a

certain extent, such slaves' new-found power parallels the romantic mode of emplotment, which suggests a hero's victory over worldly problems—in this case, a victory over their own ostensible powerlessness via the acquisition of power over someone else. This mode of emplotment corresponds with the trope of metaphor (White, *Metahistory* 8-9). However, the metaphoric implications here are partial at best, since the slave-owning slave's metaphoric paradigm may be reduced to a part of his owner's metonymic paradigm, and his ownership of another person does not grant him ownership of himself. Such a slave also bears a degree of similarity with the tropes of *nkisi* and *simbi*. Aside from being a type of fetish, as mentioned earlier, a slave also corresponds with *nkisi* by functioning as a positive yet passive link between an individual and the tradition, by token maintaining a traditional relationship with his free owner (Piedra, *Monkey* 374). In terms of a slave's ownership of another person, however, the former constitutes *simbi* by being a negative but active link between the individual and tradition. Such a relation suggests that the traditional relationship held by a slave is being challenged, and reiterates *simbi*'s association with the trickster figure (375). Such a slave's possession of a subordinate does not cancel out his own condition of being possessed by a superior. However, it may be interpreted as a step toward freedom in that it foreshadows a shift from powerlessness to power. It also illustrates that a slave may be simultaneously involved in multiple power relationships that complicate his identity. In this respect, he is similar to a recitation from the Ifá compendium—or, for that matter, any text—in that he exhibits elements of all four master tropes.

The concept of slave-owning slaves also raises another question related to Ifá interpretation: the ratio between the number of invocations of an Odu and the number of

his recitations, and the effect of such a ratio on the slave's semiotic power. Since the vast majority of slaves—especially among those who were owned by other slaves—left no record of either speech or writing, they offer no linguistic testimony comparable to the recitation of the Odu. Even among those who did leave accounts, most did not recite them multiple times, except perhaps to an amanuensis or translator. When such narratives are invoked, they tend to be done posthumously and by third parties whose only contact with the subject occurs through the reading or hearing of his text. If one compares the autobiographical accounts of slaves to those of free people, the latter were in a position that enhanced their textual influence and accessibility; thus, their accounts were more likely than those of slaves to be sought after and either recited or read during their lifetimes. Even in the case of posthumous reception of accounts by audiences, free people played a more direct role in the transference of their messages since they were more likely than slaves to be the primary authors, exercised more editorial control, and received more overt recognition for their authorial roles. By comparing the continuum of texts by both enslaved and free authors to the recitations of the sixteen principal Odus, one may note several similarities. Not surprisingly, free authors parallel the highest ranking Odus in that their names are featured more prominently in reference to their texts. Likewise, enslaved authors are more likely to parallel the lowest ranking Odu, since their names tend to be featured less prominently. Sometimes the names of slave authors are not featured at all, in which case they parallel the last of the sixteen principal Odus, who does not initiate any of the visits or recitations in which he participates.

Since the names of slave authors are less frequently alluded to than names of free authors in autobiographical accounts, the ratio between an account's recitations—or

readings—and its invocations—which may be broadly interpreted to include requests for direct contact with the author, direct references to the protagonist's name, or acts of reading or listening to any of the various editions or translations of an account—is likely to be much higher for those written by slaves. Thus, if one attempts to determine the degree of an account's semiotic power based on this ratio, the influence calculated for slave accounts tends to be much higher than the influence calculated for the accounts of free people. It should be noted, however, that the degree of an account's semiotic power is not determined solely by this ratio. As in the case of the *Odu*, one must also consider qualitative criteria. For *Odu*, this entails the types of visits and recitations carried out, which in turn influence the ratio between responsive and initiatory behaviors. The first of the sixteen principal *Odu* has the highest such ratio, while the sixteenth and final one has the lowest. The degree to which an autobiographical account is deemed responsive or initiatory depends on who begins the linguistic process that culminates in its expression. In both spoken and written formats, free people are more likely to promote their own stories without intervention from another party. Autobiographical interviews or presentations given by current or former slaves are more likely to be done at the behest of free people, often in order to expedite the latter's political or professional agenda.

This was certainly the case for the public presentations given by Abū Bakr eṣ Ṣadīq during his brief stay in England en route back to Africa. These presentations were coordinated by Madden under the auspices of the Royal Geographical Society and, in many cases, depicted Abū Bakr as an exotic phenomenon to be marveled at rather than as a full human with whom one might engage in a dialogue of equals. Like the predominantly recitative communication among lower-ranking *Odu*, some of his own

communication was recitative. Examples of this include his oral recitations of excerpts from the Qur'an for audiences in England after his manumission, and his recitation of Muslim rules in the final paragraphs of his narrative. In some ways, the recitative nature of these utterances may be said to reflect a diminished semiotic freedom of the locutor since their ideas—and in some cases their very words—did not originate with him. The matrices which Abū Bakr presents at the beginning of his narrative, and whose information he gathered through his travels to strengthen his spiritual and familial identities, may be said to further restrict his freedom in some ways. In keeping with his aforementioned statements of faith, the lists of ancestors and teachers have a recitative quality. During his enslavement in Jamaica, he uses all of this information to enhance his position in the slave hierarchy on the basis of his education, noble lineage, and Muslim faith. Due to the prohibition against Islam in Jamaica at that time, his opportunities to express his religious affiliation are severely limited. In tropological terms, this may be attributed to the limited availability of matrices—at least among the free, metropolitan class—with which his religious views were congruent. Yet they were congruent enough with the views of Madden to garner the latter's respect and trust—a process that eventually led to Abū Bakr's manumission. Thus Abū Bakr provides a good example of how the recitative ratio of a text and its connection to matrices of power may be simultaneously limiting and liberating. For him, the effect that ultimately takes precedence during his enslavement in Jamaica—limitation or liberation—depends on the subtlety with which he used his semiotic connections to achieve his means. In a broader sense, the same may be said for all slave narratives.

Manzano's accounts of his life are marked by a similarly responsive role. His oral testimonies were restricted to members of the Del Monte tertulia; their content was shared with wider audiences only after being translated, heavily edited and put in written form. Incidentally, most of Manzano's non-autobiographical oral performances were made during his childhood and were recitations of other people's texts. As with Abū Bakr, Manzano's recitation of others' texts is reminiscent of the recitative aspect of Odu communication. A further similarity with the Odus is that some of the texts which Manzano recited, such as the sermons of Fray Luís de Granada, were didactic in nature. Unlike the recitations of the Odus, Manzano's recitations were not established into a compendium. Yet, similar to the recitations by Abū Bakr, they pertained to a cultural matrix to which educated members of the metropolitan class were cognizant. Their realization of Manzano's connection to this matrix may have made them more inclined to acknowledge his sapience and, by extension, his humanity.

Montejo's accounts are in some ways even more responsive than those of the other two narrators. His interactions with other people for the purpose of recounting his story were even less numerous. This was partly due to Montejo's deliberate isolation from society as a *cimarrón*, as well as his limited intimate contact with other people even after slavery's abolition. It was also influenced by his illiteracy, which prevented him from initiating any form of written interaction. By the time he was identified by Barnet as a witness of the slave experience, he was a centenarian whose temporal displacement from slavery might be suspected of impeding his direct access to memories. Even at this point, he had very few interviews, all of which were initiated and conducted by Barnet. Barnet's intent on maintaining a relative monopoly over the representation of Montejo's

story—as evident in his threat to assassinate anyone who attempted to access archival data about Montejo without relying on Barnet as an intermediary (Barnet, *Untouchable* 288)—reflects his awareness that his status as the sole initiator of Barnet's autobiographical recitations grants him virtually unlimited power over the ultimate form and content of the message.

5.3 Invocations, Recitations, Initiations, Responses: How They Empower a Text

Ratios between invocations and recitations and ratios between initiatory and responsive recitations may have a semiotic implication. Since slaves are less likely than free people to exhibit initiatory behaviors, their accounts are more susceptible to misinterpretation, deliberate falsification, and exploitation in general. Slaves tend to have fewer liaisons in the metropolitan publishing apparatus; less awareness of the interests, biases, and expectations of metropolitan audiences; and less understanding of how rhetorical devices may be used to influence them. An ethnographer like Barnet, who is multi-lingual and cognizant of tendencies among both metropolitan and subaltern cultures, is capable of manipulating a narrative for his own purposes, especially since the proprietary rights of its narrator are severely limited. From this, one may observe that the trend regarding the ratio of initiatory to responsive behaviors from free autobiographers to enslaved ones parallels the trend from the highest to the lowest ranking Odu.

There may also be a parallel regarding the degree of abstraction. As an Odu's rank decreases, the degree of his verses' abstraction increases—as do both the ratio of invocations to recitations, and the ratio of initiatory to responsive recitations. Like the first Odu, who initiates all sixteen pairs of its visits and recitations, and who—similar to

metaphor among the master tropes—represents himself in the most direct manner possible for an Odu, a free autobiographer would have the greatest likelihood of representing himself directly. He would be the least dependent on—or susceptible to—literary mediation and thus would have the greatest chance of ensuring the fidelity of his message. Granted, any lower-ranking Odu may exploit his recitative role as an opportunity to manipulate a text provided to him from a superior, just as a slave's description of his or her life may deviate from the truth and from the questions and agenda of his free interlocutor. It is also possible that the texts of some free autobiographers, due to higher degrees of editorial intervention, shift away from metaphor and into the domain of metonymy, synecdoche, or even irony. However, such intervention is more likely and more common for the autobiographies of slaves. Thus, the final form of a slave's autobiography is more likely than a free person's text to have a high degree of abstraction. While the folklore and popular culture of slaves made use of rhetorical tropes and abstract thought, their power is likely diminished through translation and revision. In such cases, texts that may once have been rhetorically rich are at least partially denuded of their tropes so that the remnants of their original meanings are gradually reduced to literality. They may still be deemed to have abstract meanings, but if so, such meanings are chosen by people involved in the editorial process. Thus, they prioritize such mediators' interpretations and communicative goals over those of the slave author. In effect, certain tropes in the slave's native language may be omitted from edited versions. If included, their literary and cultural connotations may be de-activated or distorted. The most obvious implication of this is that translation, revision, and any other processes that alter a text diminish the agency of the original author by transferring

agency to the person who executes the alterations. Yet certain forms of agency may be maintained by the original author via the figurative meanings and cultural connotations of tropes if they are received by readers who understand them.

This still leaves the question of how a written, ostensibly autobiographical, text that, at least in terms of its oral origin, is attributed to a slave, possesses greater semiotic power, as well as more abstract modes of emplotment, explanation, ideological implication and rhetorical tropes than the autobiographical text of a free person. It is understandable that such a text would be ironic, given that its final form and content may deviate from its original narrator's intentions. Like all of the recitations carried out by the sixteenth principal Odu, it consists of responses to an initiatory utterance. In this analogy—contrary to the analogy of high-ranking/low-ranking Odus to free/enslaved autobiographers—the sixteenth (responding) Odu would correspond with the publisher who presents the account in its final form. The first (initiator) Odu would correspond with the original narrator. Thus, the account's authenticity and testimonial authority, which are attributed primarily to the narrator, are based largely on its residual nature. For most autobiographical accounts, the truth claim is based on the assumptions of first-hand knowledge on the part of the primary author and minimal intervention by secondary agents. While such a claim does not normally refer to the rhetorical intervention via the use of tropes, it seems logical to consider this factor also. Such rhetorical intervention may be carried out by anyone from the original narrator to the publisher. Further, it is logical to assume that there will be some tropes in the original version of any text. However, if the claim of an account's authenticity rests partly on the belief in its literal—rather than figurative—representation of facts, then it also purports that the use of tropes

in such accounts will be minimal. Thus, any trope in the original text detracts from the text's fidelity to the literal truth. Yet if the original does contain tropes, then the distortion of their meaning or their omission detracts from the revision's fidelity to the original. To an extent, such distortion is inevitable whenever a text is translated from one language to another. But even within a single language or dialect, a more subtle—even invisible—distortion may be possible, due to changes in authorial or editorial intention or, more specifically, in the rhetorical predisposition of the text in question.

If the tropes in a text's original language are already removed from the native culture to which they pertain, then the question is raised of to what degree their meaning and agency-yielding potential may be comprehended, accessed, perpetuated, or altered by future revisions. Tropes such as *nkisi* and *nganga* that are alluded to in Montejó's *Biografía* have their origin in the Yoruba culture of which Montejó is not a member. Thus, it may be tempting to suspect that they are already fossilized, so to speak, and that their meanings are impervious to comprehension, access, perpetuation, or alteration by Montejó. Following this line of reasoning, Montejó's use of them would still have a symbolic function, but the depth of their figurative meanings would be restricted to their roles as cultural icons. In effect, they would be dead metaphors whose once-lucid connotations would be all but inaccessible. While Montejó would still be able to alter their meanings by portraying them from an ironic or otherwise rhetorical perspective, he would not be able to perpetuate the agency inherent in their native meaning.

However, since these same two tropes have been adopted by the Santería religion in Cuba, they may be said to form part of Montejó's native cultural milieu after all. In this case, Montejó would be more likely to understand levels of their meaning beyond

that of mere cultural symbolism. His access to their semiotic matrix could grant him insider status, knowledge of their various levels of meaning, the ability to utilize such meanings to achieve agency in a manner largely unbeknownst to future readers, and the ability to perpetuate the tropes—albeit surreptitiously—as instruments of agency for use by future generations. The question of Montejo's alteration of such tropes is more enigmatic. It may be helpful to consider that at least one instance of their alteration has already occurred via their transfer from the Yoruba religion to Santería. That this transfer occurred through the syncretism of the Yoruba religion and Catholicism as an adaptation to the hardships of enslavement illustrates the creation of a new cultural and semiotic matrix via the superimposition of two older ones. Montejo's explicit references to Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes are limited to his description of slavery. Any references in the later sections of the narrative are totally implicit. While Montejo was an observer of Santería practices among his fellow slaves, his narrative does not portray him as a participant. What little is documented of his post-slavery life shows no evidence that he sought to perpetuate either Yoruba or Santería religious practices. Thus, at least to a certain degree, his transition from the environment of slavery to that of free labor—even though he continued to live for a time in the slave cabins on the plantation—constitutes the superimposition of the cultural matrices of free labor in the physical context where slavery was once practiced. More specifically, Montejo's adoption of a free lifestyle while still living in the barracoons may be interpreted as the insertion of a message of freedom into an icon—the barracoon—commonly associated with slavery. While memories of slavery are still present for Montejo, his temporal and cultural distancing from the experience alters the memories of it by causing them to be more iconic and less

direct. In keeping with the observation made by Carmen Ochando Aymerich in *La memoria en el espejo: aproximación a la obra testimonial*, Montejo's memory, like that of any person, is re-fashioned over time (Ochando 41). As a result, his cultural paradigms and his form of interaction with the Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes are altered as well, although not necessarily in a conscious or deliberate manner.

In the texts of Manzano and Abū Bakr, there are no explicit references to these meta-tropes. Yet there are multiple examples of the four master tropes, many of whose traits are similar to those of their Afro-Caribbean counterparts. Since the tropes used in these two texts are common enough in their respective languages and cultures to be considered native for their narrators, it is fair to assume that they may perform upon them the various tasks mentioned above. In the case of Manzano's text, perhaps the two most important tropes are recitation and composition. Both of these tasks are primarily oriented towards Manzano's assimilation into metropolitan "white" society; yet they are also oriented towards the reversal of Manzano's position in the existing metropolitan hierarchy. In a sense, recitation may be classified as metaphoric, due to its emulation of the master code. In keeping with *nganga* and synecdoche, it constitutes a positive but passive link between the individual and tradition (Piedra, *Monkey* 374). Composition, in contrast, may be classified as metonymic since it transitions from mere emulation to an act of creation. Granted, composition in general—and Manzano's composition in particular—still maintains a residual of the tradition upon which it is based. Yet it marks the beginning of a deviation from this tradition, both in terms of its content and form, and in terms of the person who manipulates it. Like *nkisi*, it may function as either a fetish or a hex, but it is constantly transforming, moving further from the original and closer to its

reversal. In this sense, it corresponds with the tropes of *simbi* and irony by constituting a negative and active link between the individual and tradition (Piedra, *Monkey* 375). Since the original version of Manzano's autobiography contains no words in languages other than his native language—Spanish, it is unlikely that he alluded to any non-native tropes whose meanings he could not comprehend. Granted, it contains occasional references to non-Cuban thinkers such as Fray Luís de Granada of the Spanish peninsular tradition and Voltaire and Rousseau of the French tradition. Yet neither the content of Fray Luís' sermons nor that of Voltaire's and Rousseau's writings is ever cited or discussed. At most, these references would symbolize allegedly radical intellectuals whom Manzano sought, at least in a figurative sense, to emulate. However, the sole reference to Voltaire and Rousseau is made not by Manzano but by a gentleman speaking about him to the Marchioness de Prado Ameno. Here, they represent revolutionary thinkers who sought to humanize and celebrate the noble savage. To a degree, the overseer's allusion to Rousseau may alter Rousseau's function as a trope, since it connotes his revolutionary inclination to defend the noble savage rather than his contradictory endorsement of slavery (Fairchild 122).

In Abū Bakr's text, the predominant tropes include the establishment of genealogical, educational, and religious networks, and the concept of journeying. While these networks are oriented toward the same ultimate goals—Abū Bakr's humanization and emancipation, in tropological terms they are somewhat ambiguous since they have both present and future connotations. In forging a preliminary identity for Abū Bakr, these networks correspond with the trope of *ndoki*—the agent who materializes a relation between the known and the unknown. In this sense, they are oriented more toward the

present. Yet these semiotic networks also carry a future orientation by establishing a way for Abū Bakr to more effectively communicate with certain educated readers who will recognize key components of his identity and, as a result, be more inclined to seek his emancipation. In this sense, the networks are metonymic in their treatment of Abū Bakr as a part of a greater whole. In a similar manner, if the entire narrative may be viewed as a *nkisi* or fetish in its role as a synopsis of Abū Bakr's life, then the networks mentioned at the beginning may serve as a condensed version of the fetish—a part that represents the whole.

Similar to the Afro-Caribbean tropes used in Montejo's narrative, the more minute tropes within Abū Bakr's networks—for example, the city of Bouna as a seat of learning, the different family names with their local connotations, and the qualification of being learned in Qur'anic exegesis (Wilks 152)—each constitutes a semiotic component that is unlikely to be understood by a wide readership. While they may be more deeply understood by fellow members of Abū Bakr's semiotic network, most people will interpret them as mere cultural icons. As with the tropes in Montejo's account, their deeper meanings will be largely incomprehensible and inaccessible.

Journeying, the other prominent trope in Abū Bakr's account, has important connotations in Islam. One of these is *ḥājj*, which refers to the pilgrimage required of all able-bodied Muslims to Mecca and whose completion earns a person an elevated social status. Examples of this may be seen in the names of two of Abū Bakr's teachers (Wilks 157). Like most Arabic autobiographies, Abū Bakr's does not follow a steady chronological progression (Reynolds 4). In Arabic, the word *ṭarīq*, which may connote a tangible path or an intangible method, and its cognate *ṭarīqa*, which may refer to a creed

or religion ("ṭarīq," "ṭarīqa"), may serve as a clue to the figurative role of the journey in Abū Bakr's narrative. Unfortunately, due to the inaccessibility of the original document in Arabic, the presence of this word and the use of its religious connotations in this text is entirely speculative. Nonetheless, if one considers that, at the time of his capture, he had planned to become a teacher of Qur'anic exegesis, then it may be logical to assume that he viewed the remainder of his life as both a manifestation of his faith and a strategy for his realization of his didactic goal. The references in Madden's memoir to Abū Bakr's self-instruction in Arabic and to his involvement in the Muslim slave rebellion of 1832 suggest that these goals were at least partly realized.

The predominant tropes that Abū Bakr sought to utilize outside the composition of his narrative would include his religion and the Arabic language—the latter serving as both a symbol of Muslim unity and a tool to aid in the comprehension and propagation of the Qur'an. Since Arabic was not his native language and some of what he had been taught in Africa was forgotten during his enslavement, his access to and comprehension of Arabic were necessarily limited, as was his ability to perpetuate it. However, his request for an Arabic dictionary and for both a Bible and a Qur'an in Arabic—as alluded to in Madden's memoir—illustrates an attempt on his part to compensate for these deficiencies and, in doing so, to increase his agency.

There also exists a potential for the alteration of these tropes. Abū Bakr altered the Arabic language by token of his status as a non-native speaker and writer. A tangible example in the English translation is his use of the word *tafsīr*, rather than *mufasssir*, to refer to a Qur'anic scholar. While it is doubtful that he intended any word play here, the substitution of *tafsīr*—which refers to an interpretative practice, for *mufasssir*—which

refers to the expert who performs it, is reminiscent of the interplay between the two meta-tropes *nkisi* and *nganga*. While Piedra defines these two words respectively as a fetish and an expert who manipulates a fetish to restore the natural order, various sources including Montejo and Cabrera reverse these meanings. Similar to a *nganga* priest who becomes part of the tradition that is perpetuated, so may a *mufassir*—in terms of his ideas and the use of his name in an index of teachers—become part of the tradition of *tafsīr*. Even if this double entendre had been intended by Abū Bakr, the tradition of *tafsīr* allows for interpretative alterations. In fact, within the didactic lineage of a particular interpretation, the name of each scholar may be said to represent an alteration.

Regarding alterations of the Islamic religion, the possibility for this is heightened in regions that do not pertain to the greater Islamic community (*Dar al-Islām*). This may be influenced by religious and cultural syncretism as well as by mistranslations of its sacred texts and misinterpretations of their deeper meanings. There is no evidence of such miscommunication in the brief religious commentary in Abū Bakr's narrative. However, one may argue that his ostensible conversion to Christianity appears to constitute an alteration of the religion, at least on a symbolic level. If his conversion were done in earnest, then it would constitute his removal from the spiritual network of Muslim believers and, at least in a theoretical sense, would alter the relationships within it. In his native region, this was effectively the case, since his forced removal created an absence in his local community of scholars and believers. In Jamaica, the conversion may have appeared to alter his spiritual network. Yet it was essentially a reinforcement on a personal level of the nation-wide prohibition of Islam that was already being imposed. Granted, the prohibition impeded Muslim slaves' ability to congregate and

forced them to do so in secret. Thus it altered the name and the extent of their spiritual network. However, the texts associated with Abū Bakr do not provide any conclusive evidence that it altered the content of the religious message.

While any of the four master tropes may be present in an original account, it is unlikely for the culminating trope—irony—to be the predominant trope of an autobiographical—and ostensibly literal—text. Most such texts, while containing some elements of pessimism, all contain a degree of optimism. This optimism may be based on a variety of expectations, but two key ones involve the accuracy of the narrator's romantic, tragic, or comic perception of the world, and the text's ultimate edification of its audience. The romantic, tragic and comic modes of emplotment—which correspond with the tropes of metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche respectively—all contain a degree of hope not found in satire. Satire, on the other hand, assumes that any view of the world corresponding with these modes is inadequate (White, *Metahistory* 10). By making people aware of the inadequacy of existing paradigms, satire may share the goal of edification. However, it is less conclusive than the other three modes, since it aims to refute them without providing a replacement. In this respect, satire functions like the Afro-Caribbean meta-trope *simbi* by serving as a negative but active link between the individual and the tradition (Piedra, *Monkey* 374-75). It attempts to invalidate or undermine romantic, tragic and comic mindsets in a manner similar to *simbi*'s reversal of the initial relationship between the signifier and the signified inherent in the concept of *nkisi*. Yet aside from challenging traditional relationships, *simbi*, which is ambiguous and amorphous by nature, does little to clarify their replacements. *Simbi*'s reversal of *nkisi* is reminiscent of tragedy's and satire's shared tendency to depict "an eternal return

of the Same in the Different" (White, *Metahistory* 11). In an esthetic application of Yoruba semiotics, this phenomenon could be described as an ostensible transition from signifier to signified, which masks the underlying continuity of the signifier. The absence of any permanent replacement for the signifier echoes the absence of a conclusive satirical paradigm to replace the paradigms whose legitimacy it has undermined.

Many, though not all, slave narrators possessed some level of formal education; therefore, they may have been acquainted with cultural and semiotic traditions that they could then seek to undermine. Yet most slaves who were educated before their arrival to the Americas pertained to either the Islamic tradition or one of its syncretized variants, such as those found in Yoruba-speaking regions of West Africa. In cases where deviations from the Islamic cultural norm had already occurred, slave writers tended to be unaware of them. Instead, they accepted these deviations as the norm. This was true with the amulets containing Qur'anic inscriptions used for group identification and magical protection by Muslim slaves in Brazil. It was also true in the Qur'anic recitations in the Zar-Bori rituals of slaves in the Ottoman Empire, and may have been true in the name of the deity associated with the Zar-Bori rituals: *Yavroubé*. Aside from their obvious function as sources of spiritual strength, slaves who followed these syncretistic traditions may have seen them as identity markers and perhaps the only constants over which they possessed complete control in the tumultuous environment of slavery. Thus, they would have been unlikely to seek to undermine such a tradition through a predominantly satirical text. Some slave narratives were undoubtedly more pessimistic, or tragic, than others. Yet in keeping with romance and comedy, they tended to

emphasize the emergence of new forces or conditions from processes that were ostensibly changeless (White, *Metahistory* 11). Almost all such accounts possessed an optimistic subtext—more commonly associated with romantic and comic modes of emplotment: that the expression of their story constituted an existential achievement and the creation of a semiotic sign for others to acknowledge. That this sign might extend beyond their lives and eclipse their own mortal influence reiterates the optimistic undertone.

Given the optimistic and non-satirical bent most slave narratives, it is improbable that their irony can be primarily attributed to their narrators. More likely, their irony is primarily due to specific designs of the editors or to inadvertent changes in meaning which occur as inevitable parts of the translational and revisionary processes. Each slave narrative may seem to possess greater relative influence among other works of its genre than does a typical autobiography written by a free person. However, this is due in large part to the paucity of autobiographical slave narratives, which means that each extant narrative constitutes a greater proportion of the genre than its counterpart by free people. It also means that mutual influence is more likely among slave narratives than among autobiographies of free people in terms of composition, intertextual allusion, critical comparison, or interpretation. Since both current and former slaves who were authors were less likely to share ideas with each other due to restraints on their communication than were authors who had never been enslaved, it is probable that generic similarities between their accounts are largely due to intervention by editors from the metropolitan class. This, along with the relative dearth of editors and publishers who worked with slave narratives during the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, may partially explain the comparatively high degree of similarity among slave narratives.

The intertextual connections among slave narratives are less complex than those among texts by free authors because there are fewer comparable texts from which they are likely to draw and because of the diminished likelihood of correspondence between enslaved authors. Yet both genres constitute matrices of intertextual relations that bear certain similarities with the verses of the Ifá compendium recited by the Odus. Each matrix is largely self-contained, given the limited interaction between free and enslaved writers; yet when a slave narrative is revised, edited or published by a free person, the matrices of author, editor, and publisher converge. Since a matrix is essentially a conglomeration of interconnected, contiguous relations, it is fundamentally metonymic. Such interconnectedness may be seen as influencing slave narratives in two somewhat contradictory ways: it may contribute to their complexity and diversity; yet it may also reinforce a universal element of sameness. Since metonymy and its extension, irony, are the principal tropes involved in this process, it is logical that they would echo the tendency of their corresponding modes of emplotment—tragedy and satire—to portray "an eternal return of the Same in the Different" (White, *Metahistory* 11). To paraphrase White's observation in tropological terms and expand its application beyond texts of explicitly tragic or satiric emplotment, it is reasonable to assume that any genre whose component texts exhibit matrix-like intertextuality constitutes an eternal return of metaphor in metonymy. This is reminiscent of the suggestion made by some scholars that metaphor is the more powerful and more universal trope. Yet even if this claim is valid, the richness that a slave narrative—or any other generically categorized text—may achieve via an intertextual matrix is largely dependent on metonymy.

A text written by a free author, even if intentionally ironic, still tends to be less ironic than a text composed by a slave. This is because a free author's irony is more likely to be presented in its original, unadulterated form. Signs containing multiple levels of meaning or potentially contradictory meanings are less likely to be distorted or omitted through editing when composed by a free person. Any author whose text is edited by another person may be unaware of textual distortions or omissions—and, thus, of ironies—that result from the editorial process. Yet this vulnerability is greater for enslaved authors than for free ones. While ironies that were not intended by the narrator may exist in the original version, they are more numerous in a post-authorial revision, due to inevitable shifts in perspective and in awareness of authorial or editorial intent. The implicit transfer of agency reflects a shift in power from narrator to editor. It also empowers the text itself by associating it with new meanings, intertextual matrices, and audiences. This expands the text's communicative influence and may reveal previously hidden meanings. In this way, it parallels the animation of a *nkisi* in Yoruba and Afro-Caribbean cultures. However, this empowerment gives rise to a virtually simultaneous disempowerment in which what was previously an active signifier is transformed into a passive signified—a process that parallels the reversal of *nkisi* via *simbi*.

Like slave narratives, the autobiographies of free people are generically categorized texts whose meanings are influenced through an intertextual matrix that is fundamentally metonymic. Due to the higher levels of education, cultural literacy, and textual access typically enjoyed by free people, the extent of authorial, intertextual metonymy in their texts is likely to be greater. Their textual exposure may even extend to the narratives of other slaves, thus transcending the divide between the matrices or

genres of texts by the free and the enslaved. However, such metonyms are more likely to be understood and willed by free authors, even if they result from editorial intervention, since free authors possess more negotiating power and more shared cultural awareness with editors. The key difference between these and the editorially-inserted metonyms in a slave narrative is the degree of awareness and approval on the part of the original author. A slave narrative will not normally contain more metonyms than the narrative of a free author—a fact that allows it a greater degree of interpretative indeterminacy. But those that it does contain—at least those inserted by an editor—are more likely to circumvent the author's awareness and will. Because of this, they are more likely to transfer power from the author to the editor. Nevertheless, they instill the text with an agonistic force that increases uncertainty regarding its meaning and intent. This power, like that of the satiric mode of emplotment, undermines pre-existing explanations without providing any replacement other than a general skepticism. Thus a slave narrative's textual, editorial, and interpretative malleability enhances its semiotic versatility—or in a figurative sense, its trickster-like nature.

5.4 Death and Reanimation: Evaluating Empowerment of Narratives via Tropes

In several respects, the empowerment, malleability and versatility of slave narratives parallel similar qualities found in the Afro-Caribbean meta-trope *nkisi*. Since *nkisi*, in its role as a fetish or hex, is an artificial human construct, it is devoid of any life-giving force. Yet such force is imbued to it by human agents to the extent that, while not alive, it nevertheless comes to possess its own agency—and, some might argue, its own volition. A *nkisi* is empowered by and composed of seemingly unrelated ingredients,

some of which—such as recognizable human remains and the dirt that contains them—are of animate origin. This parallels a narrative's enrichment—and in a more subtle sense, its composition—by both explicit intertextual references and the literary-cultural milieu in which what were once "living" metaphors have become dead ones that may be more subtly integrated into the social and linguistic fabric.

Part of the effectiveness of such standardized rhetorical devices is that, even under the guise of death or literalism, they maintain a residual of their living or figurative nature. They still possess the ability to represent—or be interpreted as—something other than what they are. To an extent, any text has this potential: upon being passed from an author to an editor or from an editor to a reader, it dies a figurative death, only to be reborn with a somewhat different meaning. The mere act of transference constitutes in itself a preliminary level of death and is the minimal action necessary for semiotic empowerment or rebirth to occur. This parallels the acquisition of ingredients in a *nkisi* as well as the presentation of a completed *nkisi* fetish or hex to a *nganga* priest. A more substantial empowerment of a text, however, requires not only that it be repossessed, but that it be acted upon via formal revision or interpretation. It may be argued that interpretation constitutes a kind of revision, since it assigns the text a meaning different from its literal one, and probably different from the meaning intended by its author. This, in turn, parallels the realization of the hex by the *nganga* priest. This enhanced level of semiotic death—or dismemberment—ensures that a text will not be received in its original literal form. By interpreting it—whether correctly or incorrectly—or revising it, an interlocutor effectively rearranges the metonymic relationships between different components or signifiers of the written text and their unwritten signifieds. This process is

similar to the composition of a *nkisi*, whose purpose, incidentally, is to render harm to its imminent victim. The inclusion of dead skin from a still-living target among a *nkisi*'s ingredients parallels the minute revision or (re)interpretation of textual components to render a broader revision or (re)interpretation of the text as a whole. It may be said to constitute *simbi*—due to its reversal of the initial textual *nkisi*, or to constitute irony or satire—given its refutation of earlier paradigms. Yet through its dependence on connections and contiguities between words and ideas—albeit rearranged ones—it is inherently metonymic.

The resurgence of *nkisi* in the second stage of the semiotic transfer—a stage that has a more obvious correspondence with *simbi*—illustrates two seemingly contradictory processes occurring simultaneously. Since revision and (re)interpretation have always been integral—and largely anticipated—components of both editing and reading, and are subsequent to and dependent on the initial act of composition, they constitute a positive but passive link in keeping with Piedra's esthetic definition of *nkisi*. Yet revision and (re)interpretation also constitute a negative but active link between the individual and tradition. They do this by changing the role of the original text from a causal or signifying subject to a resultant or signified object. The simultaneity of these two links may even suggest that they are one and the same, and that their different qualities are merely different facets of the same intertextual matrix. While revision and (re)interpretation constitute changes rendered upon a text, they do not constitute changes in the cycle of textual development. This seemingly contradictory tendency is in keeping with the increasingly contradictory attributes of the four master tropes as they become more abstract and approach the culmination of the tropological cycle in irony.

Just as metonymy and *nkisi* are evident at multiple stages of the semiotic process, the same may be said of irony and *simbi*. When the dead ingredients of a *nkisi* fetish or hex are combined and reanimated, their transition from life to death is reversed. This also applies to so-called “dead” metaphors or other standardized rhetorical devices whose figurative functions are no longer commonly recognized. Whenever such tropes are used, they are enlivened anew. The same principle may be said to apply to intertextual allusions that refer to other texts. Some authors even show an inkling of this phenomenon when expressing concern for their authorial legacies. They realize that, once their texts leave them, they will die and ultimately depend on editors and readers for re-animation. Yet, an important fact overlooked by many authors is that each allusion to—or re-animation of—a text inevitably alters its meaning. This diminishes an author's control over his own texts, but it also grants him partial control over others' texts via allusion, revision, or interpretation. An author's ability to alter others' texts in spite of his own texts' vulnerability to alteration parallels the situation of a slave-owning slave.

Such an ostensibly contradictory power exchange also parallels the creation of new words and the addition of new uses to existing words. If a word acquires a new meaning, its semiotic domain increases while the relative domains of its newfound synonyms decrease. In both cases, the overall matrix of vocabulary is altered. Thus, even dead rhetorical devices still possess agency due to their continued ability to alter the linguistic matrix. This occurs through future, if unforeseen, alterations of their own semiotic domains—and the indirect alteration of other words' semiotic domains—via the acquisition or deletion of meanings. Another interesting parallel may be found in the evolution of tropes. Just as synecdoche is said to be a variation of metonymy, and all

tropes may be classified as variations of metaphor, each trope constitutes an alteration of one or more tropes in the existing rhetorical system. As a new form of expression begins to transcend the accepted limits of its heretofore assigned trope—or combines features of two tropes as in the case of catachresis, a new category of trope that more accurately categorizes its function is acknowledged (Hoey 35). While the new trope maintains a residual similarity with the former trope, the range of functions that are officially associated with the former trope diminishes as a result of the new trope's creation.

Likewise, dead texts—a category which may be said to include any text over which the initial author has relinquished control—are inevitably altered through their re-animation. In the instance of editorial revisions, this is fairly obvious. It is less obvious in the case of interpretations, and still less so in the case of allusions. Since interpretations are commentaries on a text that do not necessarily aim to change it, their effect is less likely to be perceived as an alteration of the original. Yet they constitute a type of signified in a contiguous, metonymic relationship with the original text, which in turn constitutes the signifier. According to the Afro-Caribbean meta-trope *simbi*, this relationship may be reversed, so that the interpretation—or signified—effectively becomes the new signifier. In keeping with Piedra's interpretation of *simbi* as a negative but active link between the individual and tradition, an interpretation parallels the role of the individual acting upon the pre-existing tradition—or perception—of the original text (Piedra, *Monkey* 375). In theory, of course, only the very first interpretation has the opportunity to act upon a pure original, since the tradition to which any future interpretations respond will necessarily—if unknowingly—have lost this unadulterated quality. Due to the original text's involvement in this process, it is re-animated. In

keeping with the cyclical nature of tropes proposed by White, which purports that the culminating trope of irony will eventually revert to the initial trope of metaphor, an original text may temporarily re-appropriate its role as signifier. However, as a result of having been subjected to interpretation, it will never be identical to the original signifier.

Allusions to a text may include explicit commentaries, but more often, they are succinct comparisons consisting of short phrases or other rhetorical devices. Since allusion is based on a perceived relevance between two texts, it constitutes a subtle kind of interpretation. Like a more explicit interpretation, it functions as a signified image that is an outgrowth of the signifier. Although an allusion is normally not foreseen by the author of the text alluded to, it still grants the first text power as a component in the semiotic matrix of the alluding text. Its inclusion in this new text will likely cause readers to perceive it in new ways—for example, in terms of intertextual parallels of which they were previously unaware. Thus, its newly acquired meaning will at least partially be an outgrowth of its depiction in the alluding text.

In the preceding analysis, one may observe that, even though certain Yoruba meta-tropes are believed to take precedence at specific stages in the semiotic process, their functions are not necessarily restricted to these stages. When the trope of *nkisi* is broken down, another trope—*simbi*—is revealed through the reanimation of dead matter. *Nganga* may also be revealed in *nkisi* through the infusion of the *nkisi* with the blood of both senior and junior *nganga* priests. By the same token, *nkisi* is also revealed within *nganga*—both physically through the mutual contamination of the priests with the fetish or hex, and figuratively in terms of the mutual exchange of ideas between an individual and a tradition. While *ndoki*, the expert or artist who creates the initial fetish or hex, is

referred to less frequently, its role is similar to that of the *nganga* priest in that it may infuse its creation with parts of itself. *Ndoki* and *nganga* are also similar in that they are the only two meta-tropes whose folkloric components, being human, are naturally animate. Since *nkisi* and *simbi* refer to supernatural forces, they lack animation. Yet they are believed to acquire it, in both semiotic and folkloric contexts, by interacting with other tropes.

Similar revelations of one trope within another may be found among the four master tropes. One example is the reversal of the relationship between signifier and signified—*simbi* or irony as a reversal of *nkisi* or metonymy—in the interpretation of or allusion to a text. Another is the interpretation of any metonymic allusion as an ironic reactivation, as well as a semiotic alteration and redirection, of a dormant text. Further, any text could be considered metonymic on several levels. In a broad sense, it is a written part that represents the unwritten whole of the author's intended meaning. On a more minute level, it consists of a metonymic matrix of components—vocabulary, grammar, and syntax particular to different dialects or registers of language; as well as allusions to other texts—all drawn from other sources and subsequently juxtaposed together in a new context. It has been suggested that any master trope—or for that matter, any trope—is fundamentally a form of metaphor, since it constitutes a comparison of two dissimilar entities—one expressed explicitly, the other merely implied. One may also compare this function to Piedra's definition of *ndoki* as someone who realizes a relationship between the known and unknown (Piedra, *Monkey* 374). While the Yoruba anthropomorphize *ndoki*, the written or spoken signifier of a metaphor fulfills a similar function. Although a metaphor is generally regarded as inanimate, its potential for

signifying—even without being acted upon—suggests a type of animation, which could ultimately be attributed to any word or sign. Yet metaphor's primacy is brought into question by the fact that its structure—in which a written sign signifies an unwritten, but more complete, meaning—is metonymic. Since synecdoche deals with a formalization of the linguistic mode of representation, it may be said to foreshadow a type of return (White, *Tropics* 73). In this sense, it recalls the tragic and satiric modes of emplotment, both of which suggest an eternal return of the same in the different. That these modes correspond with metonymy and irony respectively reflects an essential similarity between the latter two tropes and synecdoche. That all three of these tropes—and by extension, the conceptualization of all four master tropes as a reoccurring cycle—acknowledge the contrasting concepts of similarity and difference, and anticipate a return to something currently absent or undetectable reflects their metonymic conceptualization of the space-time continuum. The self-awareness and skepticism that this cycle engenders essentially creates a new paradigm that constitutes a new metaphor—a more complex and enriched metaphor that subsumes all other tropes.

5.5 From Death to Life and from Concealment to Revelation

One reason that slave narratives may be deemed more semiotically powerful than the autobiographical narratives of free authors is that, in order to maximize empowerment or reanimation, a text must maximize death—a process that involves detachment from the original author as well as alteration, interpretation, or allusion from an interlocutor. The greater the number of intertextual connections that an author inserts in a text, the less malleable and versatile it is in regard to interpretation. A highly connected text may be

able to communicate with a variety of readers on different semiotic levels, but the freedom of these connections will be more limited due to parameters created by the author. The fewer connections, the more freely a text may be interpreted. This condition has several parallels in the field of translation. Since each word in a language bears specific connotations that are unique to the language and culture in which it is used, any text's full translation into another language is impossible. Certain aspects of its meaning will necessarily be lost. With an increase in a text's colloquialisms, syntactical complexity, number and level of abstraction of rhetorical devices, modes of emplotment, modes of argument, modes of ideological implication, and words in general, the potential for its accurate rendering in another language diminishes (White, *Metahistory* 29). Each of these components constitutes a category of intertextual connection from which a text derives its meaning. In this sense, it is both empowering by providing a pre-existing network of accessible meanings, and restrictive by implying that other meanings are inaccessible. Based on this line of reasoning, a text with fewer intertextual connections would enjoy greater semiotic freedom. The increased physical and emotional freedom traditionally associated with primitive people (McGregor 12) parallels the greater semiotic freedom of a less complex text, such as a slave narrative, in comparison to a text by a free or more highly educated author. However, almost all texts will still have incorrect interpretations whose number is directly proportional to the number and complexity of signs that they contain. Since narratives by slaves are likely to be less structurally complex and to have fewer allusions than narratives by free people, they are also likely to be more open to interpretation. Of course, this does not mean that they are absolutely indeterminate. Since the narratives under study here contain signs of Yoruba,

Arabic, Spanish, French, and English extraction, their interpretation is bound to a certain degree by pre-existing connotations from the corresponding cultures. The fewer such connections that a text possesses, the less likely that its *nkisi* will be animated and its meaning understood. This quandary will impede a text's comprehension, but it may also be a sign of power, particularly if the author's goal is to limit the text's comprehension to a particular group of readers. Beyond merely limiting comprehension, this situation may further strengthen a text's power by diminishing the likelihood that its meaning will be altered by translation, interpretation, revision, or allusion.

The continuity of either a sign or its connotation may represent the strength of the sign, its connotation(s), its creator, or the semiotic matrix to which it pertains. This is particularly true for signs whose connotations are inaccessible to foreign readers due to their untranslatability. While this challenge limits the accuracy and completeness of a translation, it may also serve to protect a text's secrets by impeding their accessibility to outsiders. If full, open communication is a text's principal goal, then this strategy is counterproductive. Yet if the text's goal is partial communication coupled with partial, but more subtle, concealment, then it may be highly effective. For any text written in a language that is foreign to the interlocutor, some of the meaning will be inaccessible. Some meaning is even inaccessible in native-language texts. While this is largely an inadvertent—if inevitable—result of translation, at times it may be deliberate. This is more likely true for texts written by marginalized or persecuted groups who aim to achieve intra-group communication with minimal outside exposure. In this sense, it relates to another common goal of slave narratives—the perpetuation of cultural identity. Since most Latin American editors during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries used

their influence to accelerate the Europeanization and whitening of their countries' populations, slave authors sought to perpetuate their cultures under the guise of assimilation. One way to do this was to use words whose meanings were only partially revealed to metropolitan interlocutors. Such words could be transcribed, or even partially translated, yet their full meanings were not disclosed. It may be argued that, due to both accidental and deliberate influences, no text's meaning is fully comprehensible, even by a free, educated audience that shares the author's native language.

If true, this is likely due to the same factors that facilitate the concealment of meaning in slave narratives. The deliberate use of foreign signs with undisclosed or partially disclosed meanings corresponds with the phenomenon of a reoccurring metaphor. In such a case, the signifier is revealed and unwavering, yet its signified remains concealed. This type of signifier could symbolize cultural, religious, and ethnic solidarity on the part of a subaltern in the face of persecution by metropolitan colonizing forces. Its signified, in turn, could represent an important means by which this solidarity is maintained. The signified could also represent the true identity of the subaltern group, which is concealed from the metropolitan colonizers under the guise of full assimilation. Perhaps the most significant example in this dissertation of such a compromise between concealment and revelation for the purpose of perpetuating cultural identity and solidarity is the multivalent function of the Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes—*ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi*. Two of the narratives—those of Manzano and Abū Bakr—contain no explicit reference to these tropes. Even in the single narrative that does contain them—that of Montejo, such references are few. Moreover, these are made in what appears to be a literally-oriented summary of behavioral customs on slave plantations; thus they do not

appear to carry figurative overtones. While topics of a religious nature are touched on, the passages that address them do not appear to be meta-critical commentaries on literature or religion. Yet in all three narratives, the influence of these tropes is evident. In many ways, these tropes parallel the four Western master tropes. However, they possess some attributes not normally associated with their Western counterparts. Their most obvious distinction is their ambivalent status as both rhetorical devices and cultural icons, the latter of which may be either animated or personified—depending on the trope—and, thus, more easily incorporated into folkloric narratives.

In analyzing autobiographical narratives, one may find several examples of the inherent omnipresence of tropes, a phenomenon that is manifest in the revelation of one or more tropes' attributes via the presence of another trope. For example, it is ironic that slave narratives, which, often appear to correspond predominantly with the metaphoric mindset due to their structural, syntactic and semantic simplicity, in some ways surpass the semiotic power of texts written by free people. The empowering and protective function of a continuous metaphor via the transmission of a slave narrative is also ironic. That this function depends largely on the concealment of a word's meaning—a trait most closely associated with metaphor—in a semiotic endeavor where revelation—a trait most closely associated with irony—is normally prioritized, is itself ironic. It is also ironic that a text with a high degree of complexity, such as the narrative of a free person—or even a heavily revised, interpreted, or intertextually connected slave narrative—is in some ways more restricted than a less well known slave narrative. In this case, the more common criteria of textual power, such as rhetoric, meta-fiction, and intertextuality, play a counter-intuitive role in binding a text to a pre-existing network of meaning that in some

ways is limiting rather than liberating. To be sure, such literary features may also empower a text by facilitating semiotic transfers through signifying matrices and providing a variety of established levels of meaning which may be revealed or concealed, accessed or not accessed, depending on the willingness and ability of each text's author and interlocutor. The concealment of a level of meaning—even in highly interconnected free authors' texts—is reminiscent of the largely metaphoric concealment of meaning in slave narratives. In some cases, it even shares the motive commonly found in subaltern literature of maintaining the cultural identity and solidarity of its affiliates by excluding others from its semiotic network. People who are perceived as threats to a group's legitimacy or solidarity are denied access to part or all the text's meaning.

In literature, one may observe different forms of textual empowerment and different views regarding this empowerment. Some people consider a text's potential empowerment to be directly proportional to its accessibility, comprehensibility, translatability and general transferability. This type of empowerment is due to the cultural importance and referentiality that a text may achieve, and is directly proportional to the frequency and depth of its comprehension by others. Because this aspect of a text's empowerment depends on its effect on others, it may also be referred to as empowering potential. For different reasons, intertextuality is sometimes seen as a measure of textual empowerment as well. Yet the degree of cultural literacy necessary for intertextuality to be effective often interferes with other criteria. The higher the level of education or cultural literacy necessary for comprehending a text, the lower its accessibility to readers. Thus, its inaccessibility constitutes a form of concealment.

In a similar vein, it is sometimes thought that a text's empowerment is ultimately dependent upon its malleability, or to express it in a more personifying term, mortality. In this sense, a text must die in order to be reborn. This rebirth, which is realized through interpretation, revision and allusion, permits the continued existence of the text, albeit in an altered state and with new meaning. It requires a shift on the part of the original text from an active signifier to a passive signified—a shift which may happen multiple times, depending on how frequently the original or any of its derivatives are read. This principle may even be said to apply to re-readings of the same text, each of which is likely to reveal new details or levels of meaning.

Contrary to the aforementioned view, a text's empowerment is sometimes considered to be dependent on its preservation over time. In this sense, the text remains as similar to its original form as possible. By preserving the vital components of its original, it clings to life, or at least minimizes death. The disadvantage of this is that such a text is more difficult to comprehend. It may still be interpreted, revised, and alluded to, but these actions are less likely to reflect an accurate understanding of the original author's intended meaning. One could argue that such texts may be more freely interpreted since they have fewer obvious connections to dominant semiotic systems; yet this does not mean that their interpretations are more likely to be correct. In many such cases, the texts' primary value is iconic. By outsiders, who, in the case of slave narratives, would be metropolitan readers, they are valued as remnants of exotic cultures. By insiders, who, in this context, would be members of the African diaspora, they are valued as symbols of survival in the face of persecution. They also function as a commodity over whose meaning insiders have a relative monopoly. Reminiscent of how

the withholding of intangible commodities such as information and literacy was used by the metropolitan class during both colonial and post-colonial times to maintain power over subaltern groups and to minimize their cultural and biological mixing with whites, in many cases the African diaspora has sought to maintain its own identity and power. While it may not seek to impose its will or abuse its power on other groups in the manner carried out by colonialists, it still maintains a type of power by guarding information among its members and creating a distinction between those who can access the information and those who cannot. Whether such information grants subalterns tangible power that could be used to harm or impose their will on others is debatable. Yet it undeniably grants them an identity. Such an identity is important because, for people who are still largely excluded from many circles of traditional power, the celebration of a subaltern identity and semiotic systems allows minorities to embrace exclusion on their own terms and to counter it with their own Afro-centric exclusionary system.

Since each person who contributes to a text realizes an alteration—either of a written or spoken text or of a lived experience, each slave may be said to have a measure of agency in shaping his or her narrative. By leaving a mark of oneself, a slave perpetuates sameness in the form of self image. Yet the creation of a new text yields a change in the intertextual make-up of the genre, and in the body of knowledge on the topic of slavery. Since a person's life is in constant flux, a text that is representative of this life will be equally changeable for as long as the subject is alive. Even after the subject's death, the text will likely continue to change as a result of new allusions and interpretations. While any text may be alluded to indefinitely, the likelihood of its ongoing interpretation may be heightened by the degree to which its meaning is

concealed. One may even say that the inaccessibility of a text's meaning increases the semiotic and temporal extent of its reanimation. These observations have parallels in the connotations of the Yoruba trickster's names. *Eshu*—perhaps its most common name—is derived from the verb *shu* meaning "to be or become dark" (Farrow 85). This name, translated as "darkness" or "the dark one," reflects the trickster's role in the process of signification (85). The alternate names "Elegbara" and "Elegba" are interpreted as either "the one who takes the body" or "the one who saves" (85-86). In this case, the taking or removal of the body parallels the appropriation and manipulation of a text or a culture—a process that, while sometimes viewed as destructive, may also be preservative.

A key image that illustrates the overlapping functions of concealment and revelation is the Signifying Monkey. The chief trickster figure of both Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean literature, its very name reflects the enigma of continuity in change. Its first word, "Signifying," reflects the quality of the first—and largely metonymic—interchange in the semiotic process: that between signifier and signified, which parallels Piedra's esthetic definition of *nkisi*. However, the structure of the power relationship inherent in this process favors the as-yet-unmentioned signifier, metaphor, or *ndoki* by granting it the status of an agent. The second word, "Monkey," may be interpreted as the agent who realizes this signifying act, in which case it would correspond with metaphor or *ndoki*. Yet it may also be viewed as an agent who adapts the message, in keeping with the standardizing function of synecdoche and *nganga*. Both the ambivalence of its function and the implication of its name in Yoruba and Afro-Caribbean folklore reflect the chimerical unreliability stereotypically associated with monkeys, subalterns, and slaves. As such, it parallels both irony and *simbi*, the latter of which, in addition to its

semiotic role, may refer to the simian sidekick of the Yoruba trickster figure Legba. Even in this two-word phrase, the interconnectedness—and, at times, apparent indeterminacy—of the master tropes provides a further example of their seeming omnipresence and inextricability. On a broader level, the Signifying Monkey illustrates how a community's identity may be guarded and perpetuated via strategies of deception and partial revelation. It is by emphasizing something different from the full truth of its identity that a community or an individual may surreptitiously maintain a measure of sameness.

The most obvious question raised by this paradox relates to the degree of sameness that may be maintained. Over time, such deviant self-representations would seem to yield changes in the core identity of a cultural group to the extent that what it is perpetuating at any given moment would bear little similarity to the identity of its predecessors at any significant remove. In African diasporic groups such as those found in Cuba, Jamaica, and other parts of the Americas, cultural changes that occur are likely due to this phenomenon, in addition to the more frequently analyzed trend of intercultural syncretism. In fact, attempts by diasporic cultures to adopt symbols or icons from their ancestral cultures—which to an extent accounts for various African-American cultures' use of the Signifying Monkey as a trope—may be termed intra-cultural syncretism, or syncretism that occurs between different generations within a single cultural group. Since intra-cultural syncretism is often practiced for the purpose of maintaining a heritage, it tends to be more diachronic and deliberate, whereas intercultural syncretism tends to be more synchronic and inadvertent. While both forms of syncretism promote the notion of cultural identity, each does so in a different way.

Intra-cultural syncretism, through its primarily diachronic approach and its greater degree of objective self-awareness, displays traits more commonly associated with the trope of metonymy. In contrast, inter-cultural syncretism, due to its more synchronic tendency and the relatively lower level of self-awareness regarding the cultural interchange, is reminiscent of the trope of metaphor. But while practitioners of intra-cultural syncretism may possess a greater degree of self-awareness regarding the cultural transformation to which they pertain, those among them who utilize occult symbols to elude comprehension by outsiders aim to prevent awareness in this latter group. It should be noted that most cultural groups are influenced by both inter-cultural and intra-cultural syncretism, since it is virtually impossible to fully isolate oneself from other groups or members of other generations. Yet most groups still prioritize one form of syncretism over the other. It may even be said that the prioritization of one form is intended to diminish or overshadow the effect of the other. The heavily assimilative strategies used by slaves such as Manzano aimed for a syncretism with contemporaneous white culture in order to overshadow their African heritage and the inherent intra-cultural syncretism that the latter reflected. The less assimilative approaches of Abū Bakr and Montejo sought to maintain at least part of either a pre-enslaved or fugitive identity in order to distinguish themselves from their metropolitan counterparts. Yet change inevitably occurred for each protagonist. As indicated earlier, Montejo is the only narrator to refer explicitly to any of the four Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes. Yet even these tropes, which are among the most powerful—if covert—tools of cultural preservation, appear to vary their meanings within the narrative itself.

When practitioners of intra-cultural syncretism seek to maintain the sameness of their own culture through the appearance of difference, and difference from other contemporaneous culture groups through the appearance of sameness, it becomes evident that while the desire of covert cultural survival may continue, the reality of their cultures will inevitably change, albeit at a slower rate. This process is reminiscent of how the combination of metaphor and metonymy yields a new and more complex metonym. To apply this paradigm to the conflict between ideological and epistemological irony—the conflict suggested by Herman Paul to summarize the dilemma described by White (Korhonen 37, 42), one may view ideological irony as a metaphor whose short-lived supremacy as an interpretative style is terminated by the recognition of epistemological irony. The latter amounts to a metonym consisting of competing metaphoric, metonymic, synecdochic, and ironic ideologies. Further, if ideological irony reflects a relationship between different ideas, and epistemological irony reflects a dialogue between different relationships, then their coexistence parallels *simbi*'s reflection of both a relationship between signifier and signified, and a dialogue between the two tropes *nkisi* and *simbi*. This parallels *simbi*'s multivalent function as both the culminating (ideological) trope in the cycle of Afro-Caribbean meta-tropes, and as the overarching (epistemological) trope—a function subtly hinted at by its anthropomorphization as one of various trickster figures. As an epistemological trope, it represents a dialogue between relationships that shows each individual relationship to be incomplete in its own right. Further, it reveals each such relationship to be dependent on other interconnected relationships for the full determination of its meaning—a meaning that may be altered at any moment. Through its function as both the culminating trope in the series and the overarching trope that

renders each stage insufficient, *simbi* is also reminiscent of Gates' description of the Signifying Monkey as a "trope-reversing trope" that subsumes all other tropes (Gates, *Blackness* 686). In effect, it may be said that it causes the meaning of any text to be at least partially indeterminate. When the metonym of epistemological irony and the metaphor of ideological irony are combined, the product is an even more complex semiotic network in which synchronically and diachronically oriented syncretistic processes result from surreptitious, trickster-like, techniques of cultural survival.

If consideration of metaphoric, metonymic, synecdochic, and ironic ideologies is necessary prior to the understanding and appreciation of the concept of epistemological irony, one may argue that the utilization of the corresponding meta-tropes—*ndoki*, *nkisi*, *nganga*, and *simbi*—is necessary to fully realize the overarching (epistemologically ironic) trope of the Signifying Monkey. This idea has parallels in the communicative process in which agency transitions from the original author; to the text itself; to readers; to editors, translators, or other alluding authors; and ultimately to more readers. It also bears similarities to Ortiz' description of the different stages of transculturation (Ortiz, *Relations* 22-24), and to the inherent tropological cultural development proposed by prominent philosophers including Vico, Burke, and Hegel (D'Angelo 32; White, *Metahistory* 124-25, 128-29).

As suggested by these philosophers, the cyclical nature of this psycho-social progression lays the groundwork for the acquisition of epistemological irony, which is essentially the rejection of all preceding metaphoric, metonymic, synecdochic, and ironic ideologies. While White views ideological irony as the (tentative) culmination of the cycle of master tropes, it is ultimately undermined by epistemological irony. Although

each of these ironies is different in nature—and in terms of the types of entities that it juxtaposes (concepts, relations between concepts, etc.), the shift from one to the other may in a sense be termed as a shift in degree of abstraction. It involves applying the agonistic, simultaneously concealing and revealing, and ultimately trickster-like nature of language to increasingly advanced thought processes, to the extent that it involves the evaluation—and renunciation—of different ideologies. While epistemological irony surpasses—and to a degree, invalidates—ideological irony and its predecessors, it is still dependent upon them for the conciliatory buildup to its own culminating revelation. This is true in terms of general outlook, and in terms of the semiotic and cognitive structures that make each outlook possible. Yet in spite of this buildup and the increasingly abstract steps that it must include, it is still contingent upon the cycle of master tropes—albeit under different guises—and upon the eternal return of the Same in the Different (See White, *Metahistory* 11). Such a return is reinforced—and even anthropomorphized—in the relation between ideological and epistemological irony and their co-representation in the figure of the Signifying Monkey.

Based on these criteria, one may say that autobiographical slave narratives are ideally suited for the realization of agency via the image of their narrators' first-hand experiences. By straddling borders regarding both genre and authorship, their very categorization suggests a degree of indeterminacy. The fulfillment of their narrators' and editors' goals is never completely guaranteed; yet the achievement of epistemological irony is virtually inevitable. While the latter condition may be true to a certain extent for any text—especially one subjected to editing, it is heightened by differences in semiotic systems, communicative agenda, and varying degrees of freedom for the people involved

in the compositional process. This also raises the question of which person is chiefly responsible for the achievement of epistemological irony—the slave narrator/protagonist or a free editor/co-author. While some members of each group were more influential than others in realizing their goals, it may be said that each contributes to epistemological irony—or achieves it in his own right—by at least partially circumventing the communicative ideology, strategy, and awareness of his collaborator. Thus, both the narrator and editor may function to a certain degree as tricksters who signify upon—or within—each others' texts. For different reasons, each person is aware of the principle of semiotic compromise inherent in such collaboration, yet accepts the deal as a necessary means to an end: the image of the freed slave. Regardless of the degree or duration of freedom acquired by a protagonist, each one achieves agency through his historical experience, and through the representation of this experience in a published narrative. In this sense, each narrator functions less as an author of his own narrative than as the protagonist of a new narrative redacted by an editor. This new narrative bears a certain similarity to the slave's experience—and to his expression of this experience—in terms of both content and appearance. It may even achieve some of the slave's authorial goals, yet it is inevitably a different text. This process and the manner in which its product is perceived by readers are reminiscent of Hayden White's definition of fetishism: "Fetishism, I have said, is a mistaking of the form of a thing for its content or the taking of a part of a thing for the whole, and the elevation either of the form or the part to the status of a content or an essence of the whole" (White, *Tropics* 194). With this in mind, each text may be viewed as a type of fetish—a metaphoric simulacrum of the text that its slave narrator wished to create, but one that perpetuates difference—in terms of content,

genre, and authorship—via the appearance of similarity. At the same time, it aims and at least partially succeeds to perpetuate similarity—a residual of each narrator's experience, cultural values and socio-political agenda—via the appearance of difference—even as it is transformed from an autobiography to a redacted narrative.

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